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ABSTRACT

Ten years after passage of the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, homelessness was studied in 11 urban, rural, and suburban communities and 4 states. The first section of the report examines the findings of detailed research on homelessness in these locations. The second section draws conclusions and outlines future directions for efforts to eradicate homelessness. The next two sections contain profiles that examine the origin of homelessness in each of these states and summarize research from the mid-1980s to the present. Every community profile contains an interview with a person who has been working in that community on homelessness issues. The final section of the report consists of interviews with national advocates, federal government officials, and state and local providers and advocates. The causes of homelessness have not been adequately addressed, and the homeless assistance legislation in 1987 did not stem the tide of homelessness. Research also indicates that expansion of the shelter system will not end homelessness. The gap between the cost of housing and what people with low incomes can afford to pay, long recognized as the principal cause of homelessness, has not improved over the last 10 years. (Contains 47 references.) (SLD)

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Homelessness in America

Unabated and Increasing

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A 10 Year Perspective

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The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH) is a national advocacy network of homeless persons, activists, service providers, and others committed to ending homelessness. Toward this end, NCH engages in public education, policy advocacy, grassroots organizing, and technical assistance.

Public Education -

NCH staff provide information to thousands of people each year, including practitioners, community groups, researchers, government staff, the general public, and the media. We publish reports and fact sheets, field many phone calls and email, and speak at conferences and workshops around the country. NCH maintains an extensive library and database on research and maintains a comprehensive home page on the World Wide Web at http://nch.ari.net.

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Since NCH provided leadership in the successful effort to pass the Stewart B. McKinney Homelessness Assistance Act in 1987, we have continued to monitor the reauthorization and appropriations process. Over the years, we've helped ensure that billions of dollars have been made available for McKinney programs such as emergency shelter grants, health care for the homeless, and education for homeless children. NCH works for services and legislation in many areas.

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The Paul Schmelzer Collection on Homelessness

The research materials on which this report is based are from the Paul Schmelzer Collection on Homelessness. This library bears the name of our beloved colleague, Paul Schmelzer, the library's guiding light for many years. The report is a testament to his love of learning and knowledge, as well as to his commitment to the education of ourselves and others. It is to Paul, his loving and generous spirit, that we dedicate this report.

Paul J. Schmelzer 1937-1997

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A 10 Year Perspective

December 1997

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INTRODUCTION

For many Americans, homelessness has become an immutable aspect of modern existence, an expected and predictable part of the social landscape. Because many younger Americans have only known a world with homelessness, a world without it is, for them, literally inconceivable. Yet homelessness as we know it today is a relatively new phenomenon. Its emergence in the late 1970s and early 1980s signaled an alarming trend which drew concern from diverse sectors of society -- churches, synagogues, state and local governments, advocates, academics, and social service providers alike. Many communities responded by providing emergency services such as shelter, food, and clothing. As homelessness increased across the country, the call for a national response to what had become a national epidemic grew louder and louder. In 1987, Congress passed and President Reagan signed the first comprehensive piece of federal legislation to address homelessness -- the Stewart B. McKinney Homelessness Assistance Act.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the signing of the McKinney Act. It is an occasion worthy of our reflection. This paper examines how we have fared in our efforts to address homelessness, what we have learned, and where we need to go to close this grim and shameful chapter of this nation's history and to ensure that homelessness is not part of America's future. The paper was written to jog the memory of those who have forgotten and to educate those who never knew, to combat the short-sightedness of current policy-making, and to renew the call for a national response to end homelessness. The massive increase in homelessness that this report documents is a stinging indictment of a failed approach. The research and interviews presented here remind us that homelessness is neither inevitable nor acceptable.

OVERVIEW

The first section of this report examines the findings of detailed research on homelessness in 15 geographic locations: 11 urban, rural, and suburban communities and 4 states.

The second section draws conclusions and outlines future directions for where we must go as a nation if we are to eradicate homelessness.

The next two sections provide profiles of homelessness in each of the 15 locations. Each profile examines the origins of homelessness and summarizes research from the mid-1980s to the present. In addition to shelter capacity and estimates of homelessness, the profiles highlight information on demographics and, where available, other trends relating to homelessness and housing. Every community profile includes an interview with a person who has been working in that community on homelessness issues for the past ten years or longer. The interviews discuss the past, present, and future, and provide insights into solutions to homelessness.

The fourth section of the report consists of interviews with national advocates, federal government officials, and state and local providers and advocates. Although all of these interviews take the passage of the McKinney Act as their starting point, they explore the past decade of homelessness from a number of unique perspectives.

METHODOLOGY

Studies of homelessness are complicated by problems of definitions and methodology. As a result of methodological and financial constraints, most studies are limited to counting people who are literally homeless -- that is, in shelters or on the streets. While this approach may yield useful information about the number of people who use services such as shelters and food kitchens, or who are easy to locate on the street, it can result in underestimates of homelessness.

Most shelters are filled to capacity and regularly turn people away. Moreover, there are few or no shelters in rural areas of the United States, despite significant levels of homelessness. Thus, many people who lack permanent housing are forced to live with relatives and friends in crowded and temporary arrangements. People who are in such unstable housing arrangements are generally not counted by research that focuses on shelter usage and street counts, yet they are, for all practical purposes, homeless, and the instability of their situation exposes them to the risk that at any time they may find themselves on the street.

Similarly, another limitation of homeless surveys is that many unhoused people will not be counted because they are not in places researchers can easily find. This group of people, often referred to as "the unsheltered" or "hidden" homeless, frequently stay in automobiles, camp grounds, or other places that researchers cannot effectively search. For instance, a national study of formerly homeless people found that the most common places people who had been literally homeless stayed were vehicles (59.2%) and makeshift housing, such as tents, boxes, caves, or boxcars (24.6%) (Link et al., 1995). This suggests that homeless counts may miss significant numbers of people who are literally homeless, as well as those living in doubled-up situations. Thus, in considering the research summarized in this report, the methodological limitations of homelessness studies should be kept in mind.

The communities selected for inclusion in this report were those that had the most reliable historical data. In some cases, such data merely measures the number of persons who are able to find shelter in publicly-funded facilities. While these numbers are not measures of homelessness, they are useful for measuring the growth in demand for services over time. We also chose, where possible, to use one-night, or point-in-time, estimates rather than annual estimates. Although point-in-time estimates distort the causes and the magnitude of homelessness (National Coalition for the Homeless, 1997), they are useful for comparing the number of people who are estimated to be in need of shelter at any point in time with the number of shelter beds available. This ratio is important if we are to understand why so many people are on our streets and in our parks despite the existence of shelter programs. In those communities where current studies or estimates were unavailable or unreliable, we used data from the most recent (1995) Consolidated Plans submitted by communities to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. These figures represent the city's "official" estimates of homelessness and shelter capacity.

Finally, each profile contains housing data from the National Low Income Housing Coalition Out of Reach reports. First issued in 1989 and using methodology developed by Cushing N. Dolbeare, these annual reports compare rents with median incomes, wages, and public assistance benefits. The Out of Reach report uses market data provided by HUD and the U.S. Census Bureau. Rental figures based on Fair Market Rents (FMRs) are determined by HUD for existing rental units for the 1997 fiscal year. These FMRs are calculated from the actual rents being charged for apartments of moderate quality and cost in each community. The study estimates affordability based on the official 30% of household income standard used in federal housing subsidy programs. Minimum wage and housing affordability calculations are based on one wage earner working full-time (40 hours per week).

FINDINGS

Finding #1

Homelessness has increased dramatically over the past ten to fifteen years. Many communities have doubled or tripled their shelter capacity in order to respond to increasing homelessness.

- In Atlanta, shelter capacity more than doubled between 1986 and 1997, increasing from 2,437 to 5,120 beds. Most of this increase has been in transitional and supportive housing.

- In Aurora, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, the annual number of nights of shelter provided more than doubled from 1986 to 1996, increasing from 11,300 to 22,726.

- In Boston, shelter capacity increased by 246% between 1983 and 1995, increasing from 972 to 3,362 beds. The number of persons counted in the city's annual one-night homeless census increased 40% between 1988 and 1996.

- In Cincinnati, the number of persons estimated to experience homelessness over the course of a year doubled between 1986 and 1992, increasing from 9,526-11,454 to 18,500-22,000.

- In Los Angeles, shelter capacity more than tripled between 1986 and 1996, increasing from 3,495 to 10,800 beds.

- In the rural town of Jeffersonville, Indiana, the number of persons receiving shelter more than quadrupled between 1989 and 1997.

- In the state of Minnesota, the number of persons in homeless shelters on one night more than quadrupled between 1985 and 1997. The increase in the number of persons receiving shelter in rural areas of the state (387%) was greater than in urban areas of the state (364%).

- In Montgomery County, Maryland, a largely suburban community, shelter capacity more than doubled between 1985 and 1996, increasing from 137 to 324 beds. The total number of bed nights more than tripled, increasing from 33,534 to 101,223.

- In New York City, the population of sheltered single adults nearly doubled between 1983 and 1987, increasing from 5,312 to 10,595. In the early 1990s, the construction of permanent housing for homeless people with mental illness and the provision of special rent-subsidies for homeless people living with AIDS reduced that number significantly; however, that trend is now reversing, with a 20% increase in the average daily census in shelters for single men and women from 1994 to 1997. The City of New York reported a total of 21,570 on a single night in September 1997 in their municipal shelters.

- In New York State, the number of persons receiving shelter in publicly-funded shelters during the course of a year increased from approximately 100,000 in 1987 to 140,000 in 1997, a 40% increase.

- In Portland, the estimated number of persons in homeless shelters over the course of a year more than doubled between 1986 and 1996, increasing from 9,258 to 20,268.

- In San Francisco, the number of emergency beds almost doubled between 1989 and 1997, increasing from 755 to 1,451. The estimated number of persons experiencing homelessness at any given point in time also doubled, increasing from 5,300-6,400 in 1989 to 11,000-16,000 in 1997.

- In Seattle, approximately the same number of persons were served by the shelter system in one month in 1986 (2,500) as were served on one night in 1996 (2,522). Shelter capacity increased from 1,584 in 1986 to 2,579, a 63% increase.

- In the state of Virginia, shelter capacity grew by 614% from 1985 to 1997, increasing from 700 beds to 5,000 beds.

- In the state of Wisconsin, the number of persons receiving shelter in state-subsidized programs more than doubled between 1987 and 1997, increasing from 11,000 to 24,600 people.

Conclusion: The causes of homelessness have not been adequately addressed. Passage of federal homeless assistance legislation in 1987 did not stem the tide of homelessness. The continued expansion of the shelter system will not end homelessness.

Finding #2

Despite the tremendous expansion of the shelter system, demand for emergency shelter far exceeds supply. Many persons have no choice but to live on the streets, in cars, doubled or tripled-up in unstable living arrangements, or in abusive situations.

- In 1997, the city of Atlanta estimated that there are more than twice as many homeless persons as shelter beds. Since June of 1997, there have been 1,400 incidents of women and children spending the night in the waiting room at the Task Force for the Homeless because all available shelter space had been filled. In response, the Task Force for the Homeless opened an emergency overflow shelter which serves an average of 44 women and children and 30 men nightly.

- In San Francisco, according to the city's estimates, there are more than seven persons for every available emergency shelter bed. Shelters routinely turn people away; some shelters run nightly lotteries for beds, while others have long waiting lists.

- In Minnesota, the total number of persons turned away from shelter almost tripled from 1985 to 1997. On one night in 1997, shelters turned away 649 persons, including 342 children -- 53% of the total.

- In Los Angeles, according to the city's own estimates, there are 5-8 homeless persons for every available shelter bed. The lack of shelter availability in Los Angeles is exacerbated by the high percentage of shelters who charge fees: in 1996, 46% of homeless programs in Los Angeles County charged for shelter beds.

- In the state of Virginia, 94,027 persons requested shelter in 1994, while 40,413 persons were turned away.

- In upstate New York, three persons are turned away for each person sheltered.

- In Seattle, there are 1.5 -2 homeless persons for every available shelter bed. On the 1996 one-night shelter survey, 919 persons were turned away from shelter.

- In the state of Wisconsin, 20,865 persons received shelter in state-subsidized shelters in 1996, while 17,833 persons were turned away.

Conclusion: Shelters do not have the resources to meet current demand. Therefore, efforts to criminalize those who cannot find shelter or housing, such as sweeps of parks and streets and bans on sleeping or sitting in public, are both futile and unjust.

Finding #3

The gap between the cost of housing and what people with low incomes can afford to pay for it -- long recognized as the principal underlying cause of homelessness -- has not improved over the past ten years. For growing numbers of persons, work provides little, if any, protection against homelessness.

- In the 11 communities and 4 states surveyed, the current minimum wage is far from sufficient to afford a one-bedroom unit at Fair Market Rent. The gap between housing and full-time minimum-wage work ranges from Cincinnati, Ohio, where an hourly wage of $7.35 is needed to afford a one-bedroom apartment, to San Francisco, California, where an hourly wage of $14.67 is needed. Nationally, the median hourly wage needed to afford a one-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent is $8.64.

- The gap between full-time minimum-wage work and the cost of housing is even greater for two-bedroom apartments, underpinning the increase in homelessness among families. In the 11 communities and 4 states surveyed, it requires from one and a half times ($9.83 in Cincinnati, Ohio) to three and a half times ($18.56 in San Francisco, California) the minimum wage to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent in 1997. Nationally, the median hourly wage needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent is $10.73 -- more than twice the current minimum wage ($5.15).

- In 1986, 11-15% of the shelter population in Atlanta was working. In 1997, 23-37% of people calling the emergency shelter hotline are working, but cannot afford the housing they are losing or have lost.

- In Cincinnati, in 1986 only 10% of the homeless population surveyed was employed; in 1992, 25% of the sheltered homeless population were employed.

- In 1989, only 3% of sheltered homeless persons in Jeffersonville, Indiana were employed; in 1997, 50% of the households who received shelter were working. Of those, 54% earned less than $6.00 per hour. In 1997, an hourly wage of $7.92 was needed to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Indiana at Fair Market Rent; an hourly wage of $9.84 was needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent.

- In 1994, 48% of persons entering homeless shelters in Virginia were working; 35% were employed full-time. As of September 1997, family heads of households moving from welfare to work earned $5.69 per hour for full-time employment; an hourly wage of $12.16 needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent.

- In 1997, 38% of persons in state-subsidized shelters in the state of Wisconsin were employed.

Conclusion: Low national un-employment rates do not mean that all working people are well-off. Without serious investment in permanent affordable housing, jobs which pay a living wage, and adequate income assistance for those who cannot work, homelessness will continue unabated into the next decade.

Finding #4

A growing portion of persons experiencing homelessness are children.

- Between 1985 and 1997, the number of children in homeless shelters in the state of Minnesota increased over 733%, from 322 to 2,683.

- In 1990 in Jeffersonville, Indiana, children represented 29% of those receiving shelter; by 1997, 52% of people sheltered were children.

- Over the past decade, the number of children sheltered in the state of Virginia increased over 258%, from 3,912 in 1985 to 14,000 in 1996.

- In New York state, half of the 140,000 people who experienced homelessness during 1997 were children and runaway youth.

- Children represent approximately one-third of persons who are in state-subsidized homeless shelters in the state of Wisconsin (35%), and in shelters the city of Portland (29%).

Conclusion: These alarming statistics challenge the persistent stereotypes of homeless people. Despite ubiquitous rhetoric about family values and investing in children, America's most vulnerable children and their families have been abandoned. Unless action is taken to secure adequate housing and incomes for their parents, the futures of hundreds of thousands of children will be jeopardized.

Finding #5

State and local policies have a significant impact on who receives shelter, thereby determining who and how many people are on the streets or in other places unfit for human habitation.

- According to Massachusetts state guidelines, families must have incomes less than or equal to 185% of the value of the maximum welfare grant to be eligible for emergency shelter. A family of three, for example, is ineligible for emergency shelter if their gross income is over $997 per month; however, given the current housing situation in Boston, a family at this income level must spend over 84% of their income for an inexpensive two-bedroom apartment, and still pay for utilities, food, and day care. Thus, many families in Boston cannot afford decent housing and yet make too much money to be eligible for temporary shelter. These families must live on the streets or in their cars, return to abusive situations, live in overcrowded conditions, or split up in order to find shelter.

- Another barrier to shelter faced by families in Boston is previous receipt of rental assistance. Families are ineligible for shelter if they received emergency rental assistance from the state within the previous 12 months. In 1996, the wait for public housing was six months, while the wait for Section 8 certificates was 3-6 months.

- When the state of Minnesota eliminated its work readiness program (a training and assistance program for unemployed persons), counties lost their state reimbursement for shelter for single unemployed persons. Hennepin County responded by disqualifying single, non-disabled persons from shelter. The county instead opened a facility called "Warm Waiting Space," where people can stay inside, but have no place to sleep. It is routinely filled to capacity.

- In August 1996, when numbers of families waiting for shelter at New York City's Emergency Assistance Unit were seasonally high, the City declared all families who were doubled up automatically ineligible for shelter. Families found ineligible under this policy are sent to Assessment Centers, where they are housed for a few nights and then found ineligible again -- even when they and their hosts insist they cannot return to the doubled-up situation. Because these families have nowhere to go, they re-apply for shelter repeatedly. After months of applying and being found ineligible, many are eventually found eligible for shelter. After months of applying and being found ineligible, many are eventually found eligible for shelter. This process, known as "churning," artificially lowers the reported numbers of homeless families in New York and has been shown to inflict serious physical and mental harm upon the thousands of men, women, and children who seek shelter. Half of all applications for emergency shelter by families in New York are denied.

Conclusion: Difficulties caused by lack of affordable housing and lack of shelter space are exacerbated by restrictions on who is deemed eligible for shelter. By enforcing restrictive eligibility criteria, communities may reduce spending on homelessness and minimize the size of their sheltered homeless populations, but they also inflict physical and emotional harm to vulnerable men, women, and children. These policies do not reduce homelessness -- they increase suffering.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

It is does not surprise many of us that homelessness has grown over the last ten years. We daily see those without homes in cities, suburbs and rural areas across our nation.What still confounds many Americans, however, is why homelessness appears to have become an immutable socio-economic condition in this nation, such that our children may not know an America without it. We have a strong economy, jobs are available -- why doesn't the American dream work for everybody?

Frustrated that it does not, our political leaders in both the White House and Congress, have shifted away from the need to address the systemic causes of poverty and homelessness and focused myopically and simplistically on the individual responsibility of those who become homeless for the misfortune deemed to be of their own making. It is this naiveté and wrong-headedness that has served to perpetuate the growth and institutionalization of homelessness, and will continue to do so if we do not finally reckon with poverty in this nation.

To reckon with poverty, long-term, we must (a) insure the stock and availability of permanent housing in healthy environments that is affordable for those with the lowest incomes, (b) provide for employment at wages deemed livable because they allow for the affordability of housing paying no more than 30% of income, (c) create a universal system of health care that is relevant to the needs and life circumstances of the poorest Americans, and includes mental health and addictions treatment as part of primary care coverage, (d) set a minimum standard of income indexed for family size that is consistent with the true cost of living, use it to replace categorical income assistance programs, and insure that standard for all Americans unable to become economically self-reliant through traditional employment because of disability, elder age or other severe limitations. Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit as one means of funding this income standard.

Steps that must be taken by this Administration and this Congress to move towards these goals include the following:

1. Commit to a $50 billion investment in capital costs for permanent housing for those whose incomes are $8 - 10,000 annually, and who are disabled, elderly poor or have severe employment barriers.

2. Fund education and job training programs whose target populations are those who are/have been homeless, those with employment histories of less than six months, and those with limited job skills.

3. Require the Interagency Council on the Homeless to develop a plan with a one year time frame that will insure that appropriate federal agencies fund programs and services relevant to their areas of responsibility, so that HUD can attend to developing and sustaining permanent housing affordable to the lowest income Americans.

4. Develop a strategic plan for addressing protracted poverty in this nation that will be committed to by members of whatever administration or congress is in office, so that the eradication of poverty in a country capable of doing so is not subject to political whims and timelines.

5. Insure that all families moving from welfare to work, whose wages are too low to afford decent housing in a healthy environment, receive a housing voucher to supplement their

earnings in order to achieve the housing stability that is fundamental to the success of welfare reform.

6. Prohibit legislation, regulation, or use of federal funds to reduce the stock or the access to subsidized housing by the lowest income Americans, without providing one for one replacement.

7. Revise the housing affordabilty standard to make it proportional to income, as we do in the tax system.

8. Stimulate and fund the spread of housing models/funding arrangements/ownership relationships that have worked effectively to insure housing stability for low income populations (i.e., cooperatives, co-housing, shared living, social ownership).

9. Appropriate funds defined in the SAMHSA reauthorization that target the treatment needs of persons who are homeless and challenged by addictions disorders.

10. Insure federal oversight and accountability for current block grant/formula programs (CDBG, mental health, substance abuse, etc.) funded to serve those with low-incomes that are not responding to the needs and life circumstances of those without homes.

11. Disabled and elderly low income households, as well as those with chronic and severe employment limitations, should be removed from income targeting parameters defined in H.R. 2 and S. 462, until one for one replacement stock has been created or vouchers funded, since the current stock of housing affordable to the lowest income populations is so limited.

12. Insure homeless children's right to public education for their stability and academic achievement.

13. Do not block grant homeless assistance funds until funding is adequate, and federal agencies insure the relevance of their mainstream programs targeted to the low income are also effectively serving those who become homeless.

The explosion of homelessness in communities across the country more than a decade ago gave rise to demands for a strong federal role in addressing what, as evidenced by myriad research documents and task force reports, was clearly a national problem. Today, the similarities among communities across the nation documented by this report once again point to the need for a concerted federal effort and direction to combat homelessness. In spite of this, President Clinton has reversed his earlier efforts to address homelessness and has initiated and supported measures that threaten to create a new, unprecedented wave of homelessness.

In 1993, just five months after taking office, President Clinton issued an Executive Order to the Interagency Council on the Homeless to develop a single coordinated Federal plan for "breaking the cycle of homelessness and preventing future homelessness." This plan, entitled Priority:Home! was developed and published in 1994 and called for a "full scale attack on homelessness." To this end, it recommended immediate action. Four years later, the President's "attack on homelessness" has ground to a halt. Worse still, the President has championed measures that exacerbate the very causes of homelessness identified by his own plan.

The most glaring example of the President's retreat on homelessness is in the housing arena -- the issue which defines homelessness itself. In 1994, the stated goal of the Interagency Council on the Homeless was "to achieve the goal of 'a decent home and a suitable living environment' for every American." Toward this goal, the Administration called for increasing housing subsidies and repairing the "damage caused by the misguided and harmful housing budget cuts of the 1980s." Yet the President's FY96, FY97, and FY98 budgets maintained the severe cuts to housing programs made by the 104th Congress, including the elimination of funding for new Section 8 certificates. It also left intact several other measures enacted by the 104th Congress which reduce poor people's access to housing, such as repeal of federal preferences and delay in the re-issuance of Section 8 certificates. As egregious as the President's abandonment of housing for low-income Americans is, it is only one part of the battle against homelessness from which the Clinton administration has retreated.

The Administration's 1994 federal plan specifically acknowledged the central role of poverty as a cause of homelessness, and identified the erosion of welfare benefits in the 1970s and 80s as a key factor underlying the growth of poverty. Yet the President ignored research that found that the Congressional welfare reform proposal of 1996 would push over one million children into poverty and signed the proposal into law. Today, welfare reform is judged a success because caseloads have declined. Whether people who exit or are terminated from welfare have jobs, whether those jobs enable them to afford housing, whether they have quality child care, whether they are homeless or hungry -- these factors do not appear to be important measures to the President or Congress alike. The early indicators, as evidenced by the increase in demand for emergency food assistance and shelter documented by the 1997 U.S. Conference of Mayors welfare reform survey, do not bode well.

The shift away from addressing the systemic causes of homelessness to focusing on individual "responsibility" for homelessness and poverty only serves to legitimize and perpetuate homelessness and the industry it has created. This shift, as well as the abdication of responsibility for social welfare programs to state and local government, ignores the ample research and data collection on homelessness over the past decade, and bodes poorly for current efforts to address homelessness. President Clinton may well succeed President Reagan as the President during whose tenure homelessness increased most dramatically and most broadly -- particularly among children and the employed.

In 1987, the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was put into law; in 1997, it has not been brought to conclusion. As a nation, we have promulgated socio-economic conditions and related public policy decisions that created the burdens and built the structures of poverty which then walled in those found behind them, making it easy for us to relegate them to the margins of our society. Ignoring the long-term consequence of doing so, we then deigned to simply "manage," maintain and contain the end results. Over the last decade the outcome of doing so has created the need to greatly expand the shelter system, as it became the safety net for much unenlightened public policy and practice that left people without homes. Ten years later, as this report documents, the breadth of families and individuals that homelessness reaches is unrelenting. As a means of commemorating the passage of the McKinney legislation, let us commit as a nation, and a people, to bringing an end to homelessness within the next five years. We have both the resources and ingenuity to do so, now we need relentless leadership calling us forth to make it happen.

COMMUNITY PROFILES

Atlanta, Georgia

Homelessness At a Glance		
	1986	**1997**
Est. Persons Homeless /One Night	3,000-5,000 (1984)	11,000
Est. Shelter Capacity /Night	2,437*	5,120
	1989	**1997**
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR	$7.69**	$10.38
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR	$9.04**	$12.12

* This figure was for the winter months, which included three overflow shelters activated only at times of extreme demand

** 1989 figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents

Origins of Homelessness:

From 1975 to 1987, rental housing costs in Atlanta increased by 41%, after adjusting for inflation, and the inventory of low-rent units shrunk by half (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1992). By 1991, there was a shortage of 46,300 affordable units. During this same period, household median income decreased by almost one percent. Between 1970 and 1987, more than 2,000 units of single room occupancy housing were lost. The 1996 Olympic Games caused an additional loss of affordable housing: an estimated 5,000-7,500 persons were displaced as a result of Olympic-related demolition (Metro Task Force for the Homeless, 1996).

Currently, nearly 5,000 units of public housing are being lost due to the development of "mixed income housing projects," which have necessitated reducing the density of the lowest income residents by initiating a new "preference" for working families. Devolution has led to local preferences being established that favor those with good credit records, no criminal records, and employment income. This "creaming" results in the displacement of thousands of residents.

Increases in housing costs and the loss of affordable housing stock have combined with stagnating wages and the erosion of public assistance to put increasing numbers of people in Atlanta at risk of homelessness. From 1975 to 1993, the value of the average public assistance (AFDC) benefit in Georgia for a family of three decreased by 12% (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 1993). The current state welfare benefit (TANF) for a family of three is less than half the Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Atlanta. As a result, many poor single mothers are unable to afford housing. A 1987 study by the Metro Task Force for the Homeless found that 64% of single-parent families were already receiving AFDC when they became homeless; a 1996 study by the Task Force found that 61% of female callers to the Task Force's 24-hour emergency shelter hotline were receiving some kind of government assistance, but could not afford housing.

For many persons in Atlanta, work provides little protection from homelessness. The Task Force for the Homeless' 1987 study of 500 male shelter residents found that 40% of the homeless men surveyed were employed, but could not afford housing. In 1997, more than double the current minimum wage was needed to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Atlanta (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 1997).

Available Data on Homelessness:

In 1984, a study by Research Atlanta estimated that between 3,000-5,000 persons experience homelessness in Atlanta on a given night. In 1987, the Metro Task Force for the Homeless gathered information from 600 residents of the shelters in Atlanta and issued the first statistical report on homelessness that was based on information received from homeless people in shelters. In addition to the findings from this study reported above, the Task Force found that 49% of women with children entering shelters had been evicted; 40% of the single men in shelters were veterans; and 609 different children of homeless families used the Atlanta Children's Day Shelter in one year.

Since 1991, the Task Force has analyzed data from its toll-free shelter hotline. A report based on analysis of hotline data in 1994 found that families with children represented 57% of the individuals who requested shelter. The primary causes of homelessness most often cited by callers to the Task Force included eviction (32%); family breakup (23%); relocation (16%); and job loss (8%).

In 1997, the city of Atlanta estimated that there are more than twice as many homeless persons as shelter beds. According to their report, approximately 11,000 persons are homeless on a given night, while existing shelter capacity totals 5,120 beds. Moreover, shelter fees and eligibility criteria limit the availability of emergency beds to those who need them. Since June of 1997, there have been 1,400 incidents of women and children spending the night in the waiting room at the Task Force for the Homeless because all available shelter space had been filled. In response, the Task Force opened an emergency overflow shelter which serves an average of 44 women and children and 30 men nightly.

Using intake data, the Task Force for the Homeless estimates that 47,753 persons experience homelessness in Atlanta over the course of a year.

Perspective: Anita Beaty, Director, Task Force for the Homeless

"And so now, ten years later, we find in Atlanta that 23-37% of those people calling our hotline for emergency shelter are still working but don't have enough income to pay for the housing they are losing or have lost. That trend has moved dramatically in ten years -- in 1986, we found that 11-15% of the shelter population was working -- that number ranges from 24% to 37% monthly as we do the numbers."

NCH: What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act?

A.B.: Back in 1985, 1986, we at the Task Force for the Homeless in Atlanta began gathering the first statistics we had ever had -- we gathered information from 600 residents of the shelters available in Atlanta and found that the overwhelming reason that people were homeless was that they didn't have resources enough to afford housing that they needed! Dick Tracy, we said. At any rate, we issued the first statistical report on homelessness that had ever been based on information received from homeless people in shelters. That information was used nationally as part of the advocacy around the effort to get the legislation passed which became the McKinney Act. Originally the legislation which was drafted by advocates was a comprehensive piece that had three parts -- emergency assistance, services, or transitional assistance and permanent housing. What remained and became the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was the first piece, and pieces of the second got in, as well as

eventually pieces of the permanent housing component. We went as far as drafting a state version of the original bill -- the Comprehensive Homeless Assistance Act. Of course, in Georgia, ours didn't go anywhere.

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness over the past 10 years?

A.B.: My gosh, how do I describe it? In 1987, having had the metropolitan Atlanta Task Force for six years, we began the Georgia Homeless Resource Network, now called the Georgia Coalition to End Homelessness, our statewide network of homeless people, advocates, providers, etc. That network is now a network of local networks -- that is, we at the Task Force have supported the beginnings of local coalitions in Cobb County, Northeast Georgia (Athens), Southeast Georgia (Valdosta and surroundings), Columbus, Macon, Savannah, Augusta, Gwinnett County -- in most cases we found funding to help those coalitions with their first computers, their first paid staff as soon as they needed staff, and Americorps volunteers from our statewide program.

In Atlanta, the Task Force has become the entity contracted to coordinate information about the needs of homeless people with the services available and to monitor the gaps between those needs and services, informing all planning processes. We developed Teams to correspond to service needs documented and reported by homeless people. We became a 24-hour information, referral and placement facility in 1989.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

A.B.: The only changes in the discrepancy between income and cost of housing/health care have been to increase the gap. Even HUD predicted in 1990 that by the year 2,000 one-third of all renters and 70% of very low income households will have housing affordability problems. We can read that as predicting homelessness for 20% of the poor population, and as that population grows poorer, homelessness will continue to grow.

Instead of moving toward making affordable housing an entitlement for all low income families, we have moved in the opposite direction, unraveling the safety net called public housing by eliminating federal preferences for homeless and no and lowest income families and individuals. We have allowed our public housing to be privatized, turning it into affordable housing for working people and using additional screening mechanisms to exclude the neediest of our citizens.

In the income area, we have raised minimum wage enough to claim that as a political victory but not enough to assure a living wage thereby. At the same time that minimum wage keeps families well below the poverty level, we have gutted the welfare entitlement program and are forcing single mothers into the bottom level jobs that are not being filled otherwise.

We have privatized the welfare system in order to compete with labor costs in third world countries. Thousands more families are seeking emergency services and becoming homeless in the wake of this policy mistake.

And so now, ten years later, we find in Atlanta that 23-37% of those people calling our hotline for emergency shelter are still working but don't have enough income to pay for the housing they are losing or have lost. That trend has moved dramatically in ten years -- in 1986, we found that 11-15% of the shelter population was working -- that number ranges from 24% to 37% monthly as we do the numbers.

Homelessness has persisted and worsened and become tolerated because we assumed we would end it by providing shelter and services for those individuals we saw daily. We assumed that we could develop specialized housing programs that would end homelessness for the residents. We did that for those people who found housing and services through our agencies and coalitions. And we changed the services system a little. But while we pulled millions of drowning people out of the river, or at least dropped ropes for them, our government was throwing millions into the river upstream.

"Homelessness has persisted and worsened and become tolerated because we assumed we would end it by providing shelter and services for those individuals we saw daily... we changed the services system a little. But while we pulled millions of drowning people out of the river, or at least dropped ropes for them, our government was throwing millions into the river upstream."

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

A.B.: I see that homelessness is a predictable outcome for at least half of the families who will be excluded from welfare/TANF benefits, unless there are housing subsidies immediately provided.

More and more working poor people will experience homelessness as housing prices rise and incomes remain stagnant.

As prisons are privatized, I see cities tending towards criminalizing all of their homeless populations and filling those prison with men who will become free to very low income labor. First, as a society, we remove housing and then we legislate against the behavior of those people we force to live outside, in public. And then we privatize the prisons (they must maintain 95% occupancy to be profitable) so that there is a ready source of labor. Ten years ago in Atlanta we were fighting to remove the ordinance against public drunkenness; this year, we are fighting to repeal the ordinance against "urban camping." A meaner spirit is marketed under the guise of "quality of life" policies.

I see the trend of a Democratic administration developing policy and thereby changes in our social services system that is more draconian than the Republicans could have accomplished. Corporate interests control public policy.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this nation to end homelessness?

It is easy to recommend policies that will end homelessness, but in order to believe in the possibility of any of those policies becoming reality, we must take back our political system.

We must register poor and homeless people to vote. We must provide media and forums for our homeless brothers and sisters to speak to the powerful. We must challenge oppressive policies in court. We must then elect leadership who will recreate our social support system, beginning with housing and employment and health care. An entitlement to housing, livable income, health care and child care will produce a healthy, just civilization.

SUBURBAN SPOTLIGHT: Aurora, Illinois

Homelessness At a Glance: Hesed House Shelter		
	1986	**1996**
Total Nights Shelter Provided /Year	11,300	22,726
Total Meals Provided /Year	34,000	67,000
Volunteer Hours/Year	12,000	41,000
	1989	**1997**
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR**	$9.23	$10.84
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR**	$10.77	$13.06

**Figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents

Homelessness is not confined to urban areas; it exists in all geographic regions, including rural and suburban areas. Data from Hesed House shelter in Aurora, Illinois, approximately one hour outside of Chicago, illustrate increasing homelessness in a suburban area.

In 1986, Hesed House provided 11,300 nights of shelter to men, women, and children. In 1988, the shelter doubled its bed space to provide beds for 120 persons. By 1996, the number of shelter nights provided had more than doubled, reaching 22,726 nights. Similarly, the number of meals provided doubled over the ten year period, increasing from 34,000 to 67,000. In 1996, and estimated 10,705 persons experienced homelessness in Kane County (Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness, 1996).

Kane County is just one of the seven "collar" counties to struggle with homelessness. A 1996 survey by the Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness estimated that 73,952 persons experienced homelessness during the course of the year in suburban Cook and the collar counties.

Leading causes of homelessness include poverty, lack of affordable housing, low wages, and domestic violence. Between 1975 and 1992, the value of the average welfare benefit (AFDC) for a family of three in Illinois decreased by 46% (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 1993). Currently, the maximum welfare grant (TANF) for a family of three in Illinois provides only half of what is needed to rent a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent. More than twice the current minimum wage is needed to rent a one or two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent. In 1992, Illinois eliminated its General Assistance program for low income individuals, further reducing the safety net for its poorest citizens.

Perspective: Diane Nilan, Associate Director, Hesed House

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness?

D.N.: I am the director of an emergency shelter which serves about 120 men, women, and children each day and each night. I am also the president of the Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness. So I am also involved with public policy and advocacy.

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the Act at that time? What is the significance of the McKinney Act now?

D.N.: At the time, it was at least a measurable point where we could begin to see the federal government's commitment or lack thereof towards ending homelessness. And now, it is a reminder that there is a long way to go.

" I think that we need to quit putting bandaids on the problem and start applying some major surgery."

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

I think that we lack the political will to free people from extreme poverty and we do not have enough "slick lobbyists" to make the changes that need to be made in our nation's policies and spending priorities.

D.N.: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

Families, families, families. You don't need to be a rocket scientist to figure that out.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this nation to end homelessness?

D.N.: I think that we need to quit putting bandaids on the problem and start applying some major surgery, or not necessarily applying, but doing major surgery to systems across the board that produce homeless people -- these systems are being left unchecked. Whether it is our criminal justice system, newly disbanded welfare system, public housing, health care system, the housing system, they all need major surgery.

Boston, Massachusetts

Homelessness At a Glance		
	1988	**1996**
Est. Persons Homeless /One Night*	3,493	4,896**
Est. Shelter Capacity /Night	2,574	3,362***
	1989	**1997**
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR	$11.54****	$12.87
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR	$13.65****	$16.13

* Figures do not include turnaways (persons seeking but denied shelter)

** State policy restricts shelter access for homeless families (see Available Data on Homelessness)

***Figures from 1995 Consolidated Plan submitted by city.

****1989 figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents

Origins of Homelessness:

In Boston, increased housing costs and changes in the housing stock have combined to create an extremely tight housing market. At the same time, incomes have not kept up with housing costs, and public benefits for poor families and individuals have been reduced.

In the 1950s, Boston had approximately 25,000 "lodging house" or single-room occupancy rooms; by 1985, 3,310 rooms remained, a reduction of almost 87%. In addition to the loss of the affordable housing, increasing costs put housing out of reach for many. In 1989, there was a documented shortage of 60,100 affordable housing units in Boston (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1989).

At the same time, erosion in the value of public assistance for the poorest families and individuals increased the numbers of persons at risk of homelessness. In 1993, AFDC benefits in Massachusetts were worth 29% less than in 1975 (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 1993). Furthermore, Massachusetts reduced its General Assistance program for individuals in 1991, resulting in the elimination of benefits for at least 10,000 recipients Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1989).

Available Data on Homelessness:

A one-night census of Boston's homeless population has been conducted annually by the Emergency Shelter Commission since 1983.

The 1983 survey identified 2,767 homeless persons. In 1996, the annual homeless census found a total of 4,896 persons, an increase of 2.5% from the previous year and a 177% increase from the first census in 1983. The number of shelter beds in Boston increased from 972 in 1983 to 3,362 in 1995 - an increase of 246%. Despite this increase, the number of men and women sleeping on the street increased from 140 in 1995 to 183 in 1996 - an increase of 30%. Data on the number of persons turned away from shelter is not collected by the Emergency Shelter Commission.

Although families represented approximately 31% of Boston's 1996 homeless census, it is important to note that state policy restricts access to emergency shelter for many poor families. According to state guidelines, families must have incomes less than or equal to 185% of the value of the maximum welfare grant. For example, a family of three is ineligible for emergency shelter if their gross income is over $997 per month; however, given the current housing situation

in Boston, a family at this income level must spend over 84% of their income for an inexpensive two-bedroom apartment, and still pay for utilities, food, and day care. Thus, many families in Boston cannot afford decent housing and yet make too much money to be eligible for temporary shelter. These families must live on the streets or in their cars, return to abusive situations, live in overcrowded conditions, or split up in order to find shelter. In 1996, the wait for public housing was six months, while the wait for Section 8 certificates was 3-6 months (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1996).

Another barrier to shelter faced by families in Boston is previous receipt of rental assistance. Families are ineligible for shelter if they received emergency rental assistance from the state within the previous 12 months. By preventing many families in need from gaining access to shelters, both policies distort the numbers of families that appear in the annual homeless census.

In 1988:

"While the City and State government, along with our service providers and volunteers, are working hard to address the needs of our City's homeless, it is important to remind ourselves that this is only a first step in the solution of the problem of homeless individuals and families. The real solution is getting the federal government back into the business of helping cities build affordable housing for needy and working families."

Raymond Flynn, Mayor of Boston, Commitment and Compassion: Boston's Comprehensive Policy for the Homeless. 1988. City of Boston, Emergency Shelter Commission.

In 1997:

"We don't want people to get too comfortable in shelter. If 120 days of housing search doesn't solve their problems, maybe a job will."

Dick Powers, Department of Transitional Assistance. "Homeless on Aid to be Given 4 Months to Find Housing," Boston Globe, March 7, 1997.

Perspective: Sue Marsh, Executive Director
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness been over the past 10 years? What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act?

S.M.: I've been Executive Director of the Massachusetts Coalition for 10 years. We have not prioritized McKinney.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

S.M.: Because of focusing on things like shelters and soup kitchens, and not on prevention and permanent answers. People have to make choices and respond to what their constituents and members say to them, and they have typically chosen to work to increase funding for homeless programs - if they have to choose between working on rent control or getting more dollars for their programs, they choose more dollars for their programs.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

S.M.: In terms of what will be funded, I see more specialized programs -- programs for working people, for disabled people, etc. -- rather than broad-based programs for all people. I see an increasing specialization and fragmentation of efforts. More and more people see their mission as helping special populations, which diffuses our energy and resources and makes it less likely that we will solve the problem. For example, now, instead of programs for homeless women, there are programs for HIV-positive women coming out of jail who have children in foster care. Rather than unite and broaden our constituency, we are becoming increasingly fragmented. Homeless people are seen as little slices of a pie, and this harms our ability to win resources.

"The talk is all about adding more shelter beds, but the conversation ends there, and as a result, we never get any further in solving the problem. I think the strategy of increasing funding for shelter programs as a way to try to get the government to move to permanent solutions has been a huge failure."

If programs save lives, that's critical. But in Massachusetts, the strategy to use shelter money to force permanent answers hasn't worked. The talk is all about adding more shelter beds, but the conversation ends there, and as a result, we never get any further in solving the problem. I think the strategy of increasing funding for shelter programs as a way to try to get the government to move to permanent solutions has been a huge failure.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this country to end homelessness?

S.M.: We can't solve the world's problems. But if we want to solve houselessness, we need to shoot rents down again so they are affordable, which we could do by creating an oversupply of cheap housing and beefing up the construction and the supply of units.

Now, people are trying to fix every problem under the name of homelessness -- that is doomed to fail. Taking on all these issues makes the task maybe impossible to achieve. If I'm supposed to come to work everyday and work to accomplish universal health care, universal housing, full employment... When did homeless advocates get the hubris to solve all of life's ills? I believe it is too bad that a lot of homeless advocates have rejected Bob Hayes' solution to homelessness: "housing, housing, housing." I think that is still it - housing, housing, housing. That's if we are talking about homelessness, not universal well-being.

"When did homeless advocates get the hubris to solve all of life's ills? I believe it is too bad that a lot of homeless advocates have rejected Bob Hayes' solution to homelessness: "housing, housing, housing." I think that is still it - housing, housing, housing. That's if we are talking about homelessness, not universal well-being."

In Boston, Dr. Ellen Bassuk came out with some research and a proposal to get psychiatric help for children in shelters. Well, then we might have healthier homeless kids, but they would still be in shelters. There are all these efforts to make it more bearable for people to be homeless, but not to address what they really need, which is a place to live.

There was a great service provider/housing developer in Boston named Mark Baker. He used to say that the single best kind of therapy is housing. Mark would interview people in the back of a car, if that's where they wanted to be interviewed, about becoming a tenant. Mark found that having a place to live made a tremendous difference in the lives of people with mental illness, more than street outreach and other kinds of service programs.

"There are all these efforts to make it more bearable for people to be homeless, but not to address what they really need, which is a place to live."

I was just reading an article about a study of employment and homelessness in Alameda County, California. The study found that employment had no significant relationship to exits from homelessness -- women were able to secure employment when they were housed. We are going about this in a very backwards way, we are trying to do the second step before the first step. We're focusing on work, or health, but first people need a roof over their head.

Cincinnati, Ohio

Homelessness At a Glance		
	1986	**1995**
Est. Persons Homeless /Year	9,526-11,454	18,500-22,000 (1992)
Est. Shelter Capacity /Night	788	958*
	1989	**1997**
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR	$6.54**	$7.35
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR	$7.69**	$9.83

*Data from the 1995 Consolidated Plan submitted by the city.

**1989 figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents

Origins of Homelessness:

In Cincinnati, as across the nation, homelessness has its roots in the simultaneous decrease in affordable housing and increase in poverty.

Cincinnati's affordable housing shortage emerged in the mid-1970s. In 1975, Cincinnati had a surplus of 12,700 low income units; by 1986, that surplus had turned into a shortage of 16,900 affordable units (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1992). Between 1970-1980, the number of SROs in downtown Cincinnati dropped from 2,104 to 994 (Community Ministry Committee, 1987).

At the same time, stagnating wages and the erosion or reduction of public assistance put housing out of reach for many poor households in Cincinnati. Between 1975 and 1992, the value of the average welfare grant (AFDC) for a family of three in Ohio decreased by 37% (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 1993). In 1997, the average welfare grant (TANF) for a family of three in Cincinnati fell $170 short of the amount need to rent a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 1997). The reduction in the value of public assistance is one factor contributing to the area's increase in poverty: between 1980 and 1990, the poverty rate for the Cincinnati area doubled from 12% to 24% of the population (Applied Information Resources, 1993). In 1990, 42% of Cincinnati's children under five years of age fell below the poverty line.

Public assistance in Ohio has also been sharply reduced for low-income individuals. In 1991, Ohio cut its General Assistance program in half by reducing benefits by 32% for most single individuals and time-limited benefits to six months out of a 12-month period. In 1992, 18 months after the GA reduction, a survey of Cincinnati service providers found that 75% of the feeding programs reported an increase in demand, 83% of the shelters reported an increase in demand, and 63% of the rent assistance programs reported an increase in demand (Applied Information Resources, 1993).

Available Data on Homelessness:

In March of 1986, the Homeless Coalition of Greater Cincinnati and the City of Cincinnati sponsored a study conducted by Applied Information Resources. In 1993, this study was updated by the same research team. Another update is planned for 1998.

According to the 1986 study, 19 shelters provided shelter services, with a total capacity of 788 person per night that could be stretched to 900. Because the 1986 study was based exclusively on shelters, the estimated numbers of homeless persons and their demographic breakdown are largely reflective of the shelter framework that existed at the time.

According to the 1986 study, 1,806 persons requested or received shelter in Cincinnati in March 1986. The study projected that the total number of persons experiencing homelessness in Cincinnati over the course of a year was between 9,526 and 11,454. The demographic breakdown was estimated to be 37.5% women and children and 62.5% men. Eighty-six percent of those interviewed were homeless for less than a year.

The 1992 survey estimated that the total number of persons experiencing homelessness in Cincinnati over the course of a year was between 18,500 and 22,000. The researchers interviewed a sample of 987 homeless persons; of these, 52% were single adults, 48% were family members, and 30% were children.

In 1986, the number one cause of homelessness reported by those persons surveyed was loss of income. Single men reported loss of income and alcohol abuse as the two largest contributing factors, while housing and domestic problems topped the list for families. In 1992, as in 1986, single men reported loss of income and alcohol abuse as the two largest contributing factors to their homelessness, while housing problems and domestic problems topped the list for homeless families.

In 1986:

"We should anticipate continuing and even increasing needs for programs and facilities for young men, and women with children, and couples with children. These people are particularly vulnerable in our current employment structure and until long term changes and improvements occur in our economic system, we will need to provide support mechanisms for those times when members of these 'populations at risk' exhaust all other resources and face homelessness."

Woods, William K. and Edward Lee Burdell, Homelessness in Cincinnati,1987.

In 1993:

"The major difference that distinguishes this report from the 1987 study is its somber conclusion. The current research leads to the realization that homelessness is integrally tied to long-term economic and social trends that are creating a growing population living below the poverty line. Thus, any successful initiatives to eliminate homelessness must be linked to systemic approaches to employment, housing, substance abuse, and health care."

Woods, William K. and Edward Lee Burdell. A Report on Homelessness in Greater Cincinnati: An Analysis of Demographic Trends and Housing Needs,1993.

The 1992 study noted two differences from the 1986 survey. First, more working persons were homeless; in 1986, only 10% of the persons interviewed were employed, while in 1992, 25% were employed. The second difference was the longer length of stay in shelters; in 1986, the average length of stay was 45 days, whereas in 1992, it had increased to over 70 days. The researchers attributed this increase to the decreasing supply of available housing to move to after leaving the shelter and an increase in the number of persons whose personal, health, and family problems prevent them from moving quickly to independent housing.

Perspective: Donald Whitehead, Outreach Coordinator
Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness been over the past 10 years?

D.W.: I spent time as a homeless person myself, three or four years. For the past three years, I've been an advocate.

NCH: What is the significance of the McKinney Act now?

D.W.: I think it is extremely significant. It has helped to lessen the effect of homelessness, and to slow its growth. But it needs to be enhanced. The funding has not kept up with the problem.

> "Unfortunately... It will take a major occasion to change people's hearts and minds about homelessness. It will take a family freezing to death, or kids freezing to death, to make people realize that we have our priorities mixed up."

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

D.W.: The shrinking affordable housing stock -- that's the biggest thing. Also, all the other changes: changes in public housing legislation and changes in safety net programs like welfare and Social Security. The slow rise of the minimum wage also has a quite a bit to do with it. There are so many factors... It's hard to narrow it down, but those are the most glaring reasons.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

D.W.: The biggest trend I see is the rising numbers of women and children who are homeless because of welfare reform. It's already under way.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this country to end homelessness?

D.W.: Unfortunately, a major tragedy. It will take a major occasion to change people's hearts and minds about homelessness. It will take a family freezing to death, or kids freezing to death, to make people realize that we have our priorities mixed up.

RURAL SPOTLIGHT: Jeffersonville, Indiana

Haven House Shelter

Year	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996*	1997**	% Change
Persons sheltered	201	189	606	547	629	703	849	N/A	1,089	+442%
Persons in Families (%)	24%	51%	45%	48%	45%	51%		N/A	90%	+66%
Children 0-18 (%)	N/A	29%	26%	30%	28%	38%		N/A	52%	+23%

* Haven House burned down in a fire on January 18, 1996. The shelter did not reopen until November 1, 1996.
** Haven House must now turn people away from shelter. In 1997, the shelter turned away 60 single people. The shelter receives some money to place families that it cannot shelter in hotels or motels. At present, 50-60 people per week stay in motels. The shelter will run out of funding for hotel/motel placement of families that it cannot presently serve in February 1998.

Homelessness is often assumed to be an urban phenomenon because homeless people are more numerous, more geographically concentrated, and more visible in urban areas. However, many people experience homelessness and housing distress in America's small towns and rural areas.

As with urban homelessness, rural homelessness has increased dramatically over the past decade. Data from Haven House shelter in Jeffersonville, Indiana, illustrate this increase.

Nine-year data from the shelter indicate a tremendous growth in the number of persons experiencing homelessness over the course of a year, particularly among families with children. In 1997, over half of the 1,089 persons sheltered at Haven House were children.

Fifty-percent of the households who received shelter from Haven House were working; of those, 54% earned less than $6.00 per hour. In 1997, an hourly wage of $7.92 was needed to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Indiana at Fair Market Rent; an hourly wage of $9.84 was needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 1997). Nor does public assistance provide enough income to enable families to afford housing. Between 1975 and 1992, welfare benefits (AFDC) for a family of three in Indiana declined in value by 44% (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 1993). Currently, a family of three would have to spend almost twice its entire welfare grant (TANF) to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent.

Recent developments in housing programs bode poorly for homelessness in Jeffersonville. The recent re-organization of the Hoosier Valley social service agency meant the loss of 20 units of

transitional housing, the loss of a homeownership rehabilitation program that previously housed 60 persons in a three-county area, and the loss of a homeownership program that previously provided housing for 300 persons each year.

Perspective: Barbara Anderson, Director, Haven House

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness over the past ten years?

B.A.: In 1985 we opened the first multipurpose family shelter in Indiana. In 1988 we assisted in the creation of the Indiana Coalition for Homeless. I also traveled within the state and in other states, and worked in Kansas. In 1990-91 when there was a discussion about McKinney being cut, we convinced Senator Lugar to lead the charge to reduce the cut from 75% to 32%. We were really proud of our involvement.

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the Act at that time? What is the significance of the McKinney Act now?

"I think that first people have to say the words out loud. They must accept responsibility, just like slavery. We made this mess and now it is time to deal with it. We need to take responsibility. We must make housing affordable, not necessarily free. And then, we need to put some oomph behind it."

B.A.: At the time, it was the admission that there was actually a problem and that we were willing to help. The admission that there was an ever-growing need. Now, it is dramatically under-funded and yet it is the most stable influence on homelessness in America.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted in your opinion?

B.A.: I feel that homelessness has persisted because we have not done too much about it. We have not really recognized it as a country, and have not dealt with the systemic problems. We have gutted the social service programs. In the 80s, we created a whole new kind of homelessness because of welfare cuts. We continue to not deal with the real issues. We have homelessness in this country because we have our priorities screwed up. These people are looked at as if they were dirt. And still we are giving the defense millions more than they need or ask for. We continue to enhance the wealthy and oppress the poor. Greedy pigs is what we are. Housing costs are out of whack. They gutted housing in the 80s and re-gutted them in the 90s. I went to Lawrenceberg, Indiana yesterday and there were houses for rent for seven hundred dollars a month. There is no way that people can afford that with minimum wage, or barely minimum-wage money.

"There will be an increase in homeless families and an increase in domestic violence. More people will be crammed into smaller spaces, and the more people there are crammed into small spaces, the more there will be domestic violence. "

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

B.A.: I see that in the future there will be more families homeless because of the welfare issues. It has already been going on in Indiana. Over 500 have already left the rolls in our community alone. We will soon see a portion of them homeless. What we are seeing at Haven House services is a dramatic increase in working poor people. Over 50% of those we have served were employed; over 80% of those we are currently serving are employed. They are employed at $6.25 and $7.00 an hour -- they cannot afford housing in our community. There will be an increase in homeless families

and an increase in domestic violence. More people will be crammed into smaller spaces, and the more people there are crammed into small spaces, the more there will be domestic violence. There will also be more crime. When people are desperate to feed their children, they will do anything.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this nation to end homelessness?

B.A.: I think that first people have to say the words out loud. They must accept responsibility, just like slavery. We made this mess and now it is time to deal with it. We need to take responsibility. We must make housing affordable, not necessarily free. And then, we need to put some oomph behind it. We need to house Americans as if housing were twenty percent of their budget. I could afford housing at twenty percent -- no one can at eighty percent of their income. And that is what the poorest are facing. We have tilted the scales on the wrong end of the stick.

"We need to house Americans as if housing were twenty percent of their budget. I could afford housing at twenty percent -- no one can at eighty percent of their income. And that is what the poorest are facing. We have tilted the scales on the wrong end of the stick."

President Clinton must lead the charge in saying the words: "A housing crisis exists in our country." As a Democrat, as a supporter of President Clinton's, as a person who campaigned and raised money for the Clinton Administration because I believed in their values, I am extremely disappointed in the lack of attention given to housing and homeless issues.

Tax reforms and campaign reforms need to occur. We need to get poor people into the electorate. Poor people need to get back into power. We don't have a Lee Hamilton sitting on everyone's desk. And he is leaving, what is going to happen now? The good people keep leaving, that's what is going to happen. They are getting so tired. They asked me if I would try to take his seat, but I can't afford to because I don't have the money. Compromises are being made. We need to look at these reforms and set new priorities and goals. Until we do this, we are not dealing with homelessness in America. Every community could do this if we look at this in the right way. We could throw money at this problem until we are blue in the face.

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Politics is why homelessness has happened. Ronald Reagan happened. We made the wrong choices. We need to look at that and realize that this is why it happened.

Los Angeles, California

Homelessness At a Glance

	1986	1996
Est. Shelter Capacity /Night*	3,495	10,800
	1988-89	**1993-94**
Est. Persons Homeless /Year*	100,000-160,000	236,400
	1989	**1997**
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR	$11.35**	$12.98
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR	$13.27**	$16.42

* Figures are for Los Angeles County

** 1989 figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents

Origins of Homelessness:

Diminished employment opportunities, stagnating wages, the erosion of public assistance programs, and a shrinking supply of affordable housing have contributed to widespread and increasing homelessness in Los Angeles.

In 1970, half of California's manufacturing jobs were located in Los Angeles County; by 1995, Los Angeles County's share of the state's factory jobs had dropped to 36% (Southern California Inter-University Consortium on Homelessness and Poverty, 1995). The reduction in manufacturing jobs and stagnating wages combined to increase the number of poor workers in Los Angeles. In 1969, approximately 7% of male workers in Los Angeles County earned under $10,000; in 1987, the percentage doubled to 14% (Wolch and Lei, 1996).

Public assistance has provided no relief from poverty and minimal protection from homelessness in Los Angeles. The maximum monthly AFDC grant for a family of three in California decreased from $850 in 1980 to $607 in 1994, a 29% reduction. In 1993, Los Angeles County reduced its monthly benefit level for single adults from $292 per month to $212 per month. Eroding welfare benefits and declining work opportunities have contributed to growing poverty in Los Angeles: the poverty level in Los Angeles City increased from 16.8% in 1980 to 20.8% in 1988 (Shelter Partnership, 1989).

As poverty in Los Angeles increased, the supply of affordable housing dropped precipitously. Population growth, increasing housing costs, gentrification, and declining federal assistance have resulted in the loss of affordable housing. Between 1974 and 1985, the number of affordable housing units fell by 42% in Los Angeles County (Wolch and Li, 1996). The percentage of households paying more than 35% of their income for rent in Los Angeles County increased from 25.5% in 1980 to 32% in 1990 (Southern California Association of Governments, 1993). From 1969 to 1986, the number of single-room occupancy units in downtown Los Angeles fell by 26%, while median monthly rents for SRO units doubled between 1980 and 1986 (Hamilton, Rabinovitz, & Alschuler, Inc., 1987).

Available Data on Homelessness:

Although comparable estimates of homelessness in Los Angeles do not exist for the ten-year period that is the focus of this report, data on shelter capacity does exist. In 1986, a United Way report identified 83 homeless shelters in Los Angeles County providing a total of 3,495 beds. In 1996, Shelter Partnership, Inc. identified 152 agencies operating 301 programs

providing a total of 10,800 beds. Thus, shelter capacity for Los Angeles County has more than tripled over the past decade. More than 100 programs providing 4,088 beds were created during the 1980s; another 126 new programs,providing 3,361 beds have been created since 1990. Forty-six percent of current homeless programs in Los Angeles County charge for shelter beds.

In 1988, Shelter Partnership, Inc. began the first of six annual estimates of persons experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County. The reports are based primarily on data from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services and the California State Department of Social Services. The surveys do not include persons living in garages or those doubled or tripled-up with friends or relatives.

The 1988-89 Shelter Partnership report estimated that between 100,000 and 160,000 persons experienced homelessness during the year, including 43,000-50,000 family members (28,000-32,000 children); 62,000-104,000 individuals; and 10,000 unaccompanied youth.

The most recent estimate of homelessness in Los Angeles is provided by Shelter Partnership's 1993-94 report. This study estimated that 236,400 persons in Los Angeles County experience homelessness during the year, including 49,000 family members (34,500 children); 175,400 individuals; and 12,000 unaccompanied youth. This study also estimates that on any given night, up to 84,300 people in Los Angeles County are homeless.

A very conservative ratio of homeless persons to shelter beds, based on data contained in Los Angeles' 1995 Consolidated Plan, is 5-7 homeless persons for every available bed.

Perspective: Bob Erlenbusch, Executive Director
Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger &Homelessness

NCH: What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act? How have you been involved in homelessness over the past 10 years?

B.E.: I participated in the grassroots campaigns at the time - constituency letter writing etc. I also participated in meetings at local level. Before that, I was part of the L.A. delegation to Housing Now!

I have been involved in homeless issues for 13 years. From 1984 to 1990, I worked with Homeless Health Care Los Angeles; in 1991, I was with West Hollywood Homeless Organization. I've been Executive Director of the L.A. Coalition to End Hunger & Homelessness since 1991.

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the Act at that time? What is the significance of the McKinney Act now?

B.E.: At the time, the passage of the McKinney Act meant that homelessness was finally recognized as a major social crisis and was given priority by the President and Congress.

Now, homelessness is business as usual - it is an annualized rite of passage or groveling at the congressional level. Congress seems to feel that it has done its "duty" regarding homelessness and is not willing to go beyond McKinney and address the larger systemic reasons why people are homeless: lack of jobs, affordable housing, etc. At the Presidential level, it is off the radar.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

B.E.: Homelessness has persisted because of the lack of commitment by policy makers at all levels to address the systemic reasons why people are homeless. The policy agenda has been shortsighted, and when this agenda has failed, policies became punitive - criminalizing people who are homeless.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

B.E.: As time limits from TANF hit, more women and children will become homeless. Also, more legal immigrants will become homeless.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this country to end homelessness?

B.E.: Affordable housing, accessible and affordable health care, community-based substance abuse programs, and public policies that address the maldistribution of wealth in this nation. Finally, military spending needs to be put back on the table to help fund necessary social programs.

Montgomery County, Maryland

Homelessness At a Glance	1985	1996
Est. Persons Homeless Sheltered /Year	2,327*	3,025
Est. Shelter Capacity /Night	137	324
Total Nights Lodging /Year	33,534	101,223
Persons Using Day Centers/Year	145	553
	1989	**1997**
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR**	$9.23	$10.79
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR**	$10.77	$12.93

*This figure is not an unduplicated number. The 1985 study found that 1,843 persons seeking shelter were turned away.

**Figures represent average state metro Fair et Rents

Montgomery County Government conducted its first study of emergency shelter services in 1984. The Fiscal Year 1985 survey reported that 137 beds were available at various times during the year, and that the available beds were filled 87% of the time. In 1985, the shelter system provided 33,534 total nights lodging; 50% of the lodging was provided to individuals, and 48% to families. According to the 1985 study, 2,327 individuals were served; this count, however, is not an unduplicated count as persons may have received lodging at more than one shelter. In 1985, 1,843 persons were not served: 1,196 were turned away because the shelter was full, and 647 because they were inappropriate for the shelter. Day shelters served 145 different individuals.

Although the shelter network added 38 beds in the 1984-85 season, the rate of occupancy still rose from 83% during the winter of 1983 -84 to 88% during the winter 84-85; the number of nights lodging provided increased from 11,723 to 16,366; the number of persons turned away during the winter because the shelter was full increased from 186 to 936.

In 1996, the Montgomery County government reported that 324 beds were available, and that the shelter system provided 101,223 total nights lodging to 3,025 persons. In 1996, day shelters in Montgomery County served 553 individuals.

Perspective: Priscilla Fox-Morrill, Executive Director, Community Based Shelter, Montgomery County, Maryland

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness over the past 10 years?

P.F.-M.: I came on as a staff member in an emergency shelter, a congregation-based overflow shelter, in the winter of 1988, and became director the following year. At that time in Montgomery County, the emphasis for funding was on family transitional programs, providing shelter for families to get children off of the street. I wasn't involved in that because I worked with the single adult homeless population. By 1992, I was working full-time in homeless programs, providing emergency shelter at the first stage of services for single adults in Montgomery County. We began the Continuum of Care that year, in late 1992. We used congregational facilities as shelter, until 1997, when a facility was built for us. In 1995, I became chair of the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless, and have been involved in advocacy since that time. In 1997, I was nominated and joined the Governor's Advisory Board on Homelessness.

In 1985:

"As evidenced by the most recent shelter expansion, the addition of shelter beds seems to be an ineffective solution to the problem of homelessness in the County if it is perceived as the only solution. The data indicates that an increase of low-income housing stock, into which shelter guests can move, is essential if either the present shelter network or an expanded system is to serve the greatest numbers of persons possible. For those individuals who are not being served by the system due to unmanageable alcohol problems or mental illness, alternative housing or shelter arrangements need to be developed."

Montgomery County Government, 1985.

NCH: What, for you, is the significance of the McKinney Act?

P.F.-M.: Since the early 1990s, the McKinney adult programs have been very successful; it has been through these programs that we've been able to provide our Continuum of Care, from emergency to permanent housing. What's exciting for me is that I've been able to see a tremendous difference in the changing of people's lives. I would estimate that in the 1980s, maybe 5-10% of the people we worked with were able to exit homelessness on their own, because there were no transitional programs at the time. Now, I'd say that we move approximately 50% of the singles we work with into transitional housing, and 5-10% into other housing arrangements.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

P.F.-M.: For the people I work with, we aren't dealing so much with homelessness but with other problems. In Maryland, we are still reducing the number of beds in state hospitals. For our program, more than half of the people we serve have serious mental health problems. These people need intensive services; they have serious, long-term problems. They need not only housing, but housing with supportive services in place. We need affordable housing, but the folks that I see can't maintain housing because of chronic problems. In the 80s, we didn't see this because we didn't deal with it. In the 80s, we called many single men "young chronics," a lot of them were Vietnam veterans, and many couldn't keep employment. I suspect that many of these men had mental health and/or substance abuse problems that went undiagnosed. Now we can provide a lot more services, because of McKinney.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

P.F.-M.: This year, we have seven McKinney programs up for renewal, then HUD changed the rules, so that the existing programs had to bid for the money that was reserved for new projects. So right now, we expect a shortfall of $5 million for the three-year period. We don't know what the fall-out will be, but we could lose a lot of services. The lack of funding could really hamper our Continuum of Care. In the past, we've been quite successful in competing for McKinney dollars, and now, with block grants, we may be penalized. In terms of trends with homelessness, I think we will see a greater number of persons with serious problems that need services. Straight housing or straight shelter will not solve their problems.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this nation to end homelessness?

P.F.-M.: I think we must educate people that many people are not always homeless for just economic reasons, many need essential services. We need housing with supportive services in place. Until that takes place, we will not end homelessness.

New York City, New York

Homelessness At a Glance

	1983	1997
Persons in Shelters/Night	16,700	24,500
	1989	**1997**
Wage needed for 1-br FMR	$9.04*	$14.19
Wage needed for 2-br FMR	$10.77*	$16.12

*1989 figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents

Origins of Homelessness:

Increasing poverty and a shrinking supply of affordable housing underlie widespread and increasing homelessness in New York City.

The New York metropolitan area's affordable housing shortage grew considerably in the 1970s. In 1976, there were 252,600 fewer low rent units than there were low income renter households (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1992). By 1987, that number had grown to 304,100 -- approximately two low income renters for every low cost unit. Loss of single room occupancy (SRO) units, an important source of housing for poor single persons, contributed significantly to New York's housing shortage: between 1970 and 1982, New York lost 87% of its $200 per month or less SRO stock (Koegel, Burnam, and Baumohl, 1996). In 1987, New York's affordable housing shortage was larger than in any other metropolitan area.

At the same time, public assistance provided no relief from poverty and minimal protection from homelessness. Between 1975 and 1992, the value of the average welfare benefit (AFDC) for a family of three in New York dropped by 43% (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 1993). Furthermore, housing allowances for welfare recipients have not enabled poor families to maintain stable housing. In 1989, 20,393 welfare households in New York City paid rents that were one and one-half times or greater than their shelter allowance; by 1996, that number had more than doubled, increasing to 54,536 households (New York State Department of Social Services). Unsurprisingly, welfare households in New York City are at high risk of homelessness. Over a seven-year period (1987-1994), 28% of the average monthly welfare caseload in New York City were forced to use the municipal family shelter system; 43% of the average monthly Home Relief (public assistance for single individuals) used the municipal shelter system (Coalition for the Homeless, 1997).

Available Data on Homelessness:

From 1987 to 1994, 394,900 different men, women, and children used the New York City municipal shelter system.[1] In 1997, there are 4,576 families (14,478 people) and 7,100 single individuals in New York City municipal shelters each night (New York State Department of Social Services).

In New York City, the population of sheltered single adults nearly doubled between 1983 and 1987, increasing from 5,312 to 10,595 (New York State Department of Social Services). In the early 1990s, the construction of permanent housing for homeless people with mental illness and

[1]Calculation based on research by Dennis Culhane, 1994. This is a more comprehensive count than the earlier, 1988-1992, study period, when Culhane found that 239,000 different men, women, and children used that system.

the provision of special rent-subsidies for homeless people living with AIDS reduced that number significantly; however, that trend is now reversing, with a 20% increase in the average daily census in shelters for single men and women from 1994 to 1997 (Coalition for the Homeless, 1997).

The family shelter system has shown less dramatic increases in demand since 1987, when court-ordered rent subsidies became available to families with children facing eviction in New York City, and later in surrounding counties. Today, some 25,000 families live with this assistance in their own apartments and have avoided the shelter system all together.

In FY1997, an average of 603 families entered the New York City shelter system each month; however, an average of only 347 families exited that system to permanent housing. In part due to the elimination of incremental Section 8 certificates and the reduction of the city's set-aside of public housing units for homeless families, permanent housing placements for homeless families in New York City dropped from 5,466 per year in FY1994 to just 4,162 in FY1997. The lack of permanent housing options, has, in turn, contributed to longer shelter stays for homeless families: in 1997, the average stay for a family in a New York City municipal shelter was 322 days -- an increase of 100 days from the previous year.

Recent city policies have had a significant impact on homeless families in New York City. In August 1996, when numbers of families waiting for shelter at New York City's Emergency Assistance Unit were seasonally high, the City declared all families who were doubled up automatically ineligible for shelter. Families found ineligible under this policy are sent to Assessment Centers, where they are housed for a few nights and then found ineligible again -- even when they and their hosts insist they cannot return to the doubled-up situation. Because these families have nowhere to go, they re-apply for shelter repeatedly. After months of applying and being found ineligible, many are eventually found eligible for shelter. This process, known as "churning," artificially lowers the reported numbers of homeless families in New York and has been shown to inflict serious physical and mental harm upon the hundreds of men, women, and children who seek shelter (Dehavenon, 1997). Half of all applications for emergency shelter by families in New York City are denied.

The Emergency Assistance Unit in 1997: A Typical Scenario

FROM: Dehavenon, Anna Lou. 1997. Charles Dickens Meets Franz Kafka in 1997: How the Giuliani Administration Flouted Court Orders and Abused Homeless Families and Children. New York, NY: The Action Research Project on Hunger, Homelessness, and Family Health.

"You were 23 years old and you were more likely than in previous years to have your partner who has lost a job with you. You also had a pre-school child with you. You are a member of one of the City's two largest ethnic minority groups and you were born in New York City. You had worked at an entry-level job, but stopped when you became pregnant. You were anemic and your child suffered from chronic asthma. Your own regular source of income was from Public Assistance and you had never had an apartment of your own.

"Before you came to the EAU you lived doubled-up in your aunt's apartment. It was severely overcrowded (3.6 persons per bedroom) and you and your son slept on the living room floor. Finally, you and your aunt agreed that you could not remain there any longer. Before living there, you had stayed with a friend, but a member of her family came back and she no longer had room for your family. You and your son slept at another friend's apartment the night before you came to the EAU.

"The morning you left you had carried all your family's belongings that you could and taken your son with you to go to your welfare center which is managed by the City's Human Resources Administration (HRA). There, your case-worker turned you over to a diversion worker who tried to persuade you to return to your relative's or friend's apartment. You could not do that because neither of them can take you back, and the center could not place you in shelter because it was too crowded. So at 5:00 p.m. after you and your son had spent the whole day at the center, they directed you to go to the EAU. You took the subway and then walked to East 151st Street and Walton Avenue in the Bronx.

"Once inside the building, the guards inspected you, your son, and your belongings with fluoroscopes, and told you not to bring any food or beverages--including bottled water into the EAU--and to go sit down in the "triage" room to wait to sign in at the window.

"It took an hour to go for your turn at the window. Here a Department of Homeless Services (DHS) triage worker asked for your identification and checked the computer to confirm that the worker at the welfare center had entered your name. The worker found your name, checked your identification again, asked if your family has any of the medical problems on a list she showed you, and then told you to go get some blankets and find a space to wait for your name to be called.

"You asked where you could go to wash your son's bottle and were told to use the water in the bathroom sink. The women's upstairs bathroom had five stalls, five washstands, and two showers. They all looked dirty. At this point, you were exhausted and frightened because no one has told you what to expect. However, your troubles, which were already significant enough to bring you here in the first place, had just begun.

"The room in which you were told to wait was furnished only with rows of hard plastic benches nailed to the floor. Most of the benches were already taken, and some families were using them as beds. Other families had already made their beds on the floor. You arranged yourself, your son and your belongings on the floor on the blanket issued you, and waited for your name to be called. When called the first time it was to see the nurse who asked to see your son's immunization card

and then inoculated him again, because you didn't have the card with you. When your name was called the second time, it was for an interview with an EAU diversion worker who asked you the same questions you answered before. He also asked if you knew a working person who would pay the difference between your welfare shelter allowance of $215 a month for one parent and one child and the rental of an apartment on the open market. You don't because your partner lost his job, and the worker could find no other housing options for you. You had already been there one whole day and night without sleeping, and you were exhausted.

"Your next wait was for your name to be called to go to the Eligibility Investigation Unit (EIU) for the determination of your family's shelter eligibility. Although the diversion workers are employees of HRS, the EIU is a part of DHS which is the final authority for a yea-or-nay decision on your obtaining a placement. During your wait, the EAU continued to fill, and hallways were pressed into service as waiting areas and sleeping spaces.

"Although you had not eaten all day, the food served at the EAU looked spoiled, and you noticed that the longer people had been in the EAU, the sicker they were. You and your son managed some milk and juice before "bedding down" on the floor for the night. You had never slept with so many strangers, the fluorescent lights were on all night, and it was very difficult to put your child to sleep because of all the noise.

"But for you, sleep was even harder to come by. The room you were in was windowless and stuffy, the fluorescent lights were harsh, a loud-speaker crackled routinely, newborns wailed and there were sudden outbursts of anger from people at the end of their rope. Nor did you trust the idea of sleep: someone might steal what little you had, or worse, you might miss hearing your name called. Other parents were even afraid to take their sick children to the hospital for fear of missing the name call. You noticed a pregnant woman going into labor; EMS eventually came to take her to the hospital.

"Hungry and exhausted by any measure, the next morning you felt dirty, depressed and even more frightened. There were dozens of families there and no one had any place else to go. (In 1997 as in 1996, homeless families were held over at the EAU every night of the year and many for multiple nights.)

"Finally, it was your turn at the EIU. They asked you why you were homeless. The worker reviewed your documents and asked if there was anywhere else you could stay. He wore a gold-colored metal badge that identified him as a fraud investigator. He told you they were going to investigate you and asked why you couldn't go back to your aunt's. He said they would go to see her to check if you were telling the truth. They would send you and your son to an Assessment Center for seven to ten days while they investigated you to find out if you were eligible.

"Now your case was pending and you sat down again to wait. Your son who had eaten the food served at the EAU began to vomit and also had diarrhea. You notice that so did many of the other children waiting around you. You asked to see the nurse but were told to wait. Finally, your son was so sick you decided to take him to the hospital. When you came back to the EAU, you found that they had logged you out, that is, your family's name had been removed from the computerized list of those waiting for an Assessment Center placement because you did not respond when your name was called, even after they gave you a pass to go to the hospital. The logging out had the effect of defining you as "having made your own arrangements" and thus of weeding you out of the City's statistics; it also meant you would have to begin the application process all over again.

"You knew that other families had also been logged out simply for failing to hear their names called, or because they came back late after being out on a medical pass. You also knew that most of them were found ineligible after they went to an Assessment Center. You re-applied and this time you were held over again at the EAU for two nights, but when your EIU interview was over, they told you they were sending you to the Auburn Assessment Center for 10 days. After another long wait, you and your son were finally bussed to Auburn at 2:30 a.m. You could only hope that what happened to the many other families you had heard about at the EAU wouldn't happen to you. But, it did. After 10 days at Auburn, you found a note under your door saying you were ineligible because you had other housing with your aunt, even though she had told them you couldn't come back.

"Over the next three months you re-applied five more times. Each time they sent you to an Assessment Center and each time they found you ineligible because they said you had other housing with your aunt. Three times you went for one of the conferences you had a right to with the DHS legal staff to discuss why they had found you ineligible. At each conference, the City's ineligibility decision was upheld by the same people who made it in the first place. Finally, after you re-applied the sixth time, they told you your family was eligible for shelter and yours was definitely among those whom the City had arbitrarily subjected to its abusive policy of churning their shelter applications.

Portland, Oregon

Homelessness At a Glance

	1986	1996
Est. Persons Homeless /Year	9,258	20,268*
Est. Children Homeless /Year	2,416** (1988)	4,797**
	1989	**1997**
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR	$7.50****	$9.42
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR	$9.23***	$11.62

* Figure represents Multnomah County

**Figures are for school-aged children from Oregon Department of Education for Portland School District

***1989 figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents

Origins of Homelessness:

In 1975, Portland had 8,200 fewer low rent units than low income renter households. Between 1975 and 1986, that shortage more than tripled (Center on Policy and Budget Priorities, 1992). By 1986, there was a shortage of 26,500 affordable units in Portland -- nearly two low income renters for every low cost unit.

The loss of affordable housing was in part due to a large reduction in the number of inexpensive residential hotels. In 1970, Portland had 4,128 downtown residential hotels, which made up the bulk of low income housing downtown. Between 1970-78, this supply decreased by 33% (City of Portland, Office of the Mayor, 1988). Between 1978-1986, another 1,081 residential hotels were lost, resulting in a 59% decline over 16 years.

At the same time, stagnating wages and erosion of public benefits put housing further out of reach for many poor households in Portland. Between 1975 and 1992, the value of the average welfare benefit for a family of three in Oregon decreased by 47% (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law). In 1997, the average welfare grant (TANF) for a family of three in Portland fell $144 short of the amount need to rent a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 1997). Unsurprisingly, housing assistance programs cannot meet demand. In 1996, the wait for public housing in Portland was 2 years, while the wait for Section 8 vouchers and certificates was over four years (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1996).

Available Data on Homelessness:

In 1987, a year-long study by the Emergency Basic Needs Committee Coalition Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Shelter, Clean-Up, and Clothing reported that 9,258 people received one or more nights of shelter services from August 1985 through June 1986.

Twice a year the Office of Multnomah County Community Action and Development coordinates a one night shelter count to "accurately identify all persons sheltered or turned away from shelter in both public and private facilities." These counts do not include homeless persons who on the night of the survey did not seek shelter. In November 1996, the survey counted 2,252 persons, including 309 persons turned away from shelter. An equal number of families and singles were turned away from shelter. This count was the largest ever recorded. Based on this one night count and the average shelter stay calculated by the State of Oregon, an estimated 20,268 persons experienced homelessness in Portland during the course of the year. Families account for just under half of those persons experiencing homelessness.

Perspective: Dona Bolt, Coordinator, Education of Homeless Children and Youth Oregon Department of Education

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness over the past ten years?

DB: I have been the state coordinator for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth program in Oregon for the past ten years.

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the McKinney Act 10 years ago, and what is the significance of the McKinney Act now?

DB: The significance originally had to do with the new awareness in this country of increasing homelessness. The subject was new to the public, the media, academia, the government. There had never before been discussion dealing with issues such as homeless children's rights to public education. The Act was ground-breaking.

Today, its significance lies in the fact that McKinney programs are still targeting the poorest of the poor -- the homeless -- even though the novelty of homelessness has faded and people seem to be growing accustomed to having shelters and so-called "street people" in their communities.

> "I will never get used to seeing homeless children and youth in the richest country in the world. I've come to think of homeless kids as being victims of abuse by the society at large. Homelessness among children is really child abuse perpetuated by an uncaring society."

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

DB: Because huge numbers of outspoken people can't get over their belief that "these people" choose homelessness as a lifestyle, and choose to live off cash assistance from taxpayers and charities. They cut the subsidies for low-income housing and welfare for what they consider moral reasons, while supporting tax breaks for corporations, developers and the wealthy. And the mistrust of government in general has led to the financial sabotage of programs out there which were actually helping to stem the tide of abject poverty.

I also think homelessness persists -- and this will sound horrible -- but I also see more and more unregulated charitable ventures out there which need homelessness to keep their donations coming in. At times they are duplicating services which are already provided, in a far superior fashion, by public agencies. Charitable schools for homeless children are a big-time example. The public ends up paying for the same thing twice -- once with their taxes, then again with their charitable contributions. And while it sounds heartless to knock a charitable venture, it's open season on government projects.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

DB: Homelessness will grow as the population increases, until people see the direct relationship between homelessness and the supply of affordable housing in our communities. And it won't end, so long as people keep treating poverty and lack of housing as moral problems.

Welfare reform is certainly not going to end homelessness. Restricting eligibility is an artificial way of reducing the caseload, and this will come back to haunt us. There is already such a stigma attached to being a welfare recipient -- try being poor, untrained and ineligible for

assistance on for size. You can be a minimum wage earner with a family, and still be homeless, not for moral reasons but because there aren't any homes around you can afford. Then try moving to find housing and work -- you'd think it was a crime.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this nation to end homelessness?

"There needs to be a shift in values, away from the individual and toward the collective good of society. An attitudinal change needs to occur among the 'haves' and their perception of the 'have nots.'"

DB: There needs to be a shift in values, away from the individual and toward the collective good of society. An attitudinal change needs to occur among the "haves" and their perception of the "have nots." I hate to use those terms, however I really do feel that this is a class issue.

NCH: Is there anything else you would like to add?

DB: I will never get used to seeing homeless children and youth in the richest country in the world. I've come to think of homeless kids as being victims of abuse by the society at large. Homelessness among children is really child abuse perpetuated by an uncaring society.

San Francisco, California

Homelessness At a Glance	1989	1997
Est. Persons Homeless/ Night	5,300-6,400*	11,000-16,000**
Est. Shelter Capacity /Night***	755	1,451
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR	$11.35****	$14.67
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR	$13.27****	$18.56

* City of San Francisco, 1989

**Data from the 1995 Consolidated Plan submitted by the city to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

***Emergency shelter only. In 1986, an additional 1,707 persons were temporarily sheltered in hotels through vouchers from the Department of Social Services and 435 were in transitional housing programs. In 1997, 1,602 units of transitional housing were available. The Department of Social Services no longer provides vouchers for temporary hotels.

****1989 figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents

Origins of Homelessness:

San Francisco has the highest housing costs in the nation and the lowest vacancy rate for rental housing. From 1980 to 1990, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment increased 110%, while the average household income increased by only 34%. From 1978-1988, rents for vacant studio apartments increased by 183%, and rents for Single Room Occupancy units increased by 166%; these rent increases were nearly double the city average.

In addition to these rent increases, San Francisco lost a significant portion of its affordable housing stock through demolition or conversion during the 1970s. From 1975 to 1988, the city's stock of low-cost residential hotel rooms decreased from 32,982 to 18,723, a 43% reduction. From 1977 to 1988, San Francisco lost 550 board-and-care homes -- a form of low-cost housing for mentally disabled people -- due in large part to declining state reimbursements.

The loss of affordable housing stock and increasing rents lead to a severe shortage of affordable housing. Between 1975 and 1986, the San Francisco-Oakland area's affordable housing shortage nearly doubled. By 1989, there was a shortage of 79,900 units -- 2.7 low wage renters for every low rent unit (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1992).

At the same, public assistance and wages failed to keep up with housing costs. From 1980 to 1989, while rents increased by well over 100%, the AFDC benefit for a family of four increased only 39%, General Assistance benefits for single people increased only 45%, and the state minimum wage increased only 37%. Since then, public assistance has been reduced. The maximum monthly AFDC grant for a family of three in California decreased in value by 17% between 1988 and 1992 (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 1993).

Public housing programs in San Francisco meet a small proportion of the need. The waiting list for public housing grew from 2,991 households in 1988 to 9,085 households in 1993. The current wait for public housing and Section 8 certificates is two years; for Section 8 vouchers, the wait is 32 months (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1996).

Available Data on Homelessness:

In 1989, the city of San Francisco estimated on any given night, 5,300-6,400 persons were homeless.Of the 2,900 persons receiving shelter, 25% were in shelters; 60% were in temporary hotel rooms; and 15% were in special programs.

In 1997, the city estimates that 11,000-14,000 persons are homeless on any given night. There are more than seven persons for every available emergency shelter bed. Due to the lack of emergency shelter beds, shelters routinely turn people away; some shelters run nightly lotteries for beds, while others have long waiting lists.

In 1989:

"If there is one looming factor that has contributed more than anything else to the growth of homelessness during this decade, it is the continuing shortage of affordable housing. People can be poor for a number of reasons, but they are homeless because they do not have a place to live."

City of San Francisco, Beyond Shelter: A Homeless Plan for San Francisco

In 1997:

"I can't talk with these people anymore. They're not on the same page. There are some people who just don't want to live inside, and there's nothing you can do with them. They are the hobos of the world. They don't want help."

Willie Brown, Mayor of San Francisco

Perspective: Paul Boden, Director, Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco

NCH: What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act? How have you been involved in homelessness over the past 10 years?

P.B.: The California Homeless Coalition was involved in sending local statistics and letters of support to Washington. At that time, I was working as a social worker in an emergency shelter drop-in center in the Tenderloin. Later I worked as a site supervisor for a program for homeless mentally ill people with no source of income. We worked to get them hooked up with treatment, housing, SSI, and MediCal. In 1987, I helped to found the Coalition on Homelessness.

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the McKinney Act?

> "The government has continued to cut funding for permanent housing and permanent treatment and has replaced it with case management, outreach workers, and shelter beds. McKinney has created 'simulated' stable living environments and 'simulated' treatment plans."

P.B.: On the positive side, it focused the local planning process within the Health Department and helped identify the needs of homeless people. On the negative side, it allowed for case management to be a vehicle to fill that need. I think there are probably some decent programs that have been created, but as a public policy issue... I bet if we could add it up, we'd see a lot of units of affordable housing that were available to poor people in general that have been taken off the market through the development of supportive transitional housing programs. I bet there's less available to poor people because of utilizing McKinney money to make housing that is program-specific.

I don't know of any McKinney-funded projects that are open access for homeless people. When McKinney money went to shelters that had been generic, it changed the culture to case management, disability-identified. And that meant two things: First, the most severely disabled persons were not able to access shelter because the programs were maintained in a congregate environment -- you have to be disabled to be eligible for shelter, but in a congregate environment, the most severely mentally ill people keep everyone else awake and so they get kicked out. Second, changing shelters to the case management, disability-identified model fed the assumption that if you are homeless, there's something inherently wrong with you, which in turn furthered the institutionalization of the homeless industry. It also fed the policy of the "bad" homeless people -- the people that are outside of McKinney programs.

McKinney has also severely limited the ability of homeless people to get gainful employment within the homeless industry. It caused programs to upgrade their hiring requirements and salaries, and required cumbersome reporting processes. McKinney's emphasis on serving disabled people meant that programs hired special counselors with high levels of experience and education. Now you need a degree to work in a homeless shelter... In the early 80s, most of us working in shelters, at all levels, were from the community or the streets. There were a few people that were professionals in the social services arena, but mainly the programs came from the community-based advocacy efforts of poor people and community people. Now it's just the opposite, there's a few community people and homeless people, but it's predominantly social service professionals -- which has severely curtailed the social justice agenda in addressing homelessness.

The government has continued to cut funding for permanent housing and permanent treatment and has replaced it with case management, outreach workers, and shelter beds. McKinney has created "simulated" stable living environments and "simulated" treatment plans. That phrase, "simulated stable living environment," actually came from a New Jersey program's definition of itself as a transitional housing facility!

McKinney is a cost-effective way for the federal government to say that it is addressing homelessness - it's the cheapest way they could think of to do it. Prior to McKinney, shelter programs referred to themselves as temporary housing programs. Now, they are zoned as permanent facilities. McKinney has institutionalized shelters as de facto housing for a segment of people in the community.

"Housing, education, treatment, and employment. That's it. That's all people need. Anything that isn't directly connected to those four things is a bandaid. Not all bandaids are bad. But have you ever met a well-educated, well-employed person with access to treatment and housing who was homeless? I haven't."

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

P.B.: Because of programs like McKinney. McKinney changed who was being served. It is clearly the dominant culture that shelters serve the federal government, because that is where they get their funding. Shelters look at what activities the government is funding so they can keep themselves in existence. You can't tell me that homeless people came up with McKinney!

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

P.B.: I think, like with welfare reform, at some point the government will say "this isn't working" and they will defund these programs. Then there will be no community-based programs to replace the programs, because the McKinney programs are not connected to the community. Homeless people won't rally around programs that have been treating them like shit.

I think we will continue to see disabled people cut off SSI, and the responsibility placed on the local community, which can't handle it. So there will be an increase in anti-homeless policies, sweeps of homeless encampments, etc.

In the long run, as local urban centers tourist themselves, shopping mall themselves, entertainment themselves, and as blue collar jobs go to other countries, we will see the growth of shantytowns on the borders of cities. It's impossible for poor people to spread out like the government wants them to, with the current trends in zoning laws, demolition of public housing, anti-homeless laws.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this nation to end homelessness?

P.B.: Housing, education, treatment, and employment. That's it. That's all people need. Anything that isn't directly connected to those four things is a bandaid. Not all bandaids are bad. But have you ever met a well-educated, well-employed person with access to treatment and housing who was homeless? I haven't.

Seattle, Washington

Homelessness At a Glance

	1986	1996
Est. Persons Homeless in Shelter	2,500/one month*	2,522/one day**
Est. Persons Homeless /One Night	N/A	3,900-4,545 (1995)***
Est. Shelter Capacity /Night	1,584	2,579
	1989	**1997**
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR	$7.69***	$10.48
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR	$9.04***	$13.27

* 1986 study found that 4,979 (likely duplicated) requests for shelter were denied. A street count in 1986 found 359 persons sleeping on the streets.

** 1996 study found that 919 persons were turned away from shelter; this study also included a street count of 302 persons. Forty-four of the 77 King County homeless programs participated in the 1996 survey.

***Data from 1995 Consolidated Plan submitted to HUD.

****1989 figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents

Origins of Homelessness:

Private and public redevelopment lead to the loss of 15,000 housing units in downtown Seattle between 1960 and 1986; an additional 4,500 mostly lower cost, rental units were lost to demolition and condominium conversion in the 1970s (Church Council of Greater Seattle, 1987). Between 1980 and 1986, more than 2,000 downtown low-income units were lost due to abandonment, rent increases, demolition, and change in use.

As a result of these changes and other changes in the housing market, the Seattle-Tacoma area's affordable housing shortage grew more than fivefold between the mid-1970s and 1987 (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1992). By 1987, there was a shortage of 44,900 affordable units --nearly two and one half low income renters for every low cost unit.

Changes in the state and local economy in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in greater unemployment and lower-paying jobs. Between 1979 and 1985, the number of people in King County who exhausted their unemployment benefits increased 149% (Church Council of Greater Seattle, 1987). The State of Washington experienced a significant loss of manufacturing jobs: 24,000 workers in 1985-86 lost their jobs as a result of mass layoffs or plant closures. More than 78% of these jobs were in the manufacturing sector, where the average annual wage was 40% higher than the state average annual wage. Job growth during this period was in the lower-paying service sector: between 1977 and 1987, most of the 30,000 new jobs that were created were service or clerical jobs.

As changes in the economy were pushing people out of higher-paying jobs and into unemployment or lower-paying jobs, benefits for poor families declined in value. Between 1975 and 1992, the value of the average welfare benefit for a family of three in Washington fell by 35% (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 1993). Furthermore, in 1991 Washington reduced its General Assistance program for low-income single individuals (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1992).

Available Data on Homelessness:

The Seattle-King County Coalition for the Homeless, formerly called the Seattle-King County Emergency Housing Coalition, has conducted annual surveys of King County emergency shelters and transitional housing programs over the past 18 years.

In November 1986, the Coalition conducted a month-long study of the area's shelters and reported that while 2,500 persons received shelter, 4,979 requests for shelter (likely duplicated) were denied. Of those who received shelter, 60% were single men, 8% were single women, and 29% were families. The 1986 survey found that only 21% of those who received shelter resolved their situation that month by moving to permanent housing; of the rest, 26% moved to another shelter, 20% stayed in the shelter, 16% returned to their previous situation, 12% disappeared, and 5% moved in with family and friends.

On October 23, 1996, the Seattle-King County Coalition surveyed 44 of the County's 77 homeless programs. On that one day, 2,522 persons received shelter, and 919 requests were denied. Of those persons served, children under 17 represented 26% of the total.

Perspective: Martha Dilts, Director, Housing and Community Services, Seattle
Interview by Tim Harris, RealChange

"Twenty years ago I was Executive Director of a family shelter for homeless families, the first of its kind in the country. Our first task was getting people to understand that homelessness was happening to families in this community.

"We joined together with other groups in 1979 to form the Seattle King County Coalition for the Homeless, at that time the Emergency Housing Coalition. Our chief effort then was public education, so that people would understand this problem was happening and why, and then solve it.

"I think we have to keep working towards ending homelessness, or we will never get there. Unless we always have that vision of ending it, while we work to help people everyday, we'll continue just to manage homelessness and therefore contribute to its increase."

"Looking back at old articles from then, that was a time when there was really public compassion. The newspaper articles all speak to the horror of this problem, and take a really compassionate look at the people it's happening to, and look towards solutions. I think we've seen a change in tenor since then, and that we need to work with the media to get the kind of coverage we need.

"I do believe that people are still compassionate in this community, and I see that everyday with volunteers who are trying to help. I think, however, that the public discussion on homelessness and welfare reform and other services does not take into consideration the challenges that people face when they are poor. It's more likely to blame them for the obstacles and barriers they face, instead of looking at ways to help.

"I believe that we in the community who are advocates for people who are poor and homeless need to redouble our efforts to get the word out about homelessness, not just about individuals and the excellent programs we have, but also about the systemic causes, so that all the public discussions of change will also take into consideration obstacles and barriers that people face.

"People in this community are great volunteers, and while I don't think that volunteering solves homelessness, I think it can get people closer to the issue as they get closer to people who are actually suffering. In this, stereotypes are often broken.

"The homeless women's forums in the last two years have done an excellent job of that. All those women together in a room looking at a common problem; the comment I often heard from people who are new to this issue was how easy it would be for women in the room to interchange roles. The scary thing about homelessness, I think, is how normal it is, and how normal people are who are homeless.

"I think compassion fatigue becomes real when people don't see that there's a way out, and I think one thing we need to do a better job with is showing the systemic causes and also showing that there are solutions, like the housing levy, that really work in our community.

"We know how to solve homelessness on an individual basis. We have programs in this community that are innovative leaders in the country that do wonderful things for people on an individual basis. We have invested a large amount of capital in those programs. However, as we work on creating those programs and a service system, we find that people are still up against systemic causes of homelessness.

"I think we have to keep working towards ending homelessness, or we will never get there. Unless we always have that vision of ending it, while we work to help people everyday, we'll continue just to manage homelessness and therefore contribute to its increase. Which means that in this day and time, when our human services are being looked at very critically, and we're looking at welfare reform and different kinds of devolution, we really need to keep in front of our minds the obstacles that poor people face and how homelessness is created, so that as these services change people are hopefully helped rather than hurt.

"Seattle, which has chosen for the past dozen years to actually use general fund money to fund services, is trying to take a stance on welfare reform. The Mayor does have a new initiative committing $6.5 million over the next two years to take a look at who is being hurt by welfare reform and how we can help and support people, mainly through the Seattle jobs initiative and connecting people to livable wages.

"I think that Seattle, as is our reputation, is really trying to be proactive given that things are changing on both federal and state levels, and that makes me hopeful.

"In the early 80s when the Reagan cuts came, it was a time of first oppression on the behalf of people trying to run services, and then some creativity. My hope is that in this current change, while things look like they could be really bleak and more people could become homeless and it will be much tougher for people to get back on their feet, that if enough people get in and really struggle with the changes that also some positive things can happen."

From, "A Matter of Perspective: 20 Years of Poverty and Homelessness in Seattle," in Real Change, Seattle's Homeless Newspaper.

STATE PROFILES

State of Minnesota

Homelessness At a Glance		
	1985	**1997**
Est. Persons Homeless in Shelters /One Night	1,165	5,462
Est. Children in Shelters /One Night	322 (28%)	2,683 (49%)
Persons Turned Away	219	649
Children Turned Away	39 (18%)	342 (53%)
Est. Shelter Capacity /Night	1,420 (1986)	5,099
	1989	**1997**
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR*	$8.27	$9.04
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR*	$9.81	$11.52

* 1989 figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents

Origins of Homelessness:

Lack of affordable housing and increasing poverty are two of the major factors underlying the quadrupling of homelessness in Minnesota over the past decade.

Between 1975 and 1989, the shortage of affordable housing in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area nearly doubled (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1992). By 1989, there were nearly two low-income renters for every low cost unit. At the same time, stagnating wages and erosion of public assistance benefits put housing out of reach for increasing numbers of people. Between 1975 and 1992, the value of welfare benefits for a family of three in Minnesota dropped by 38% (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 1993). Furthermore, in 1991, Minnesota sharply reduced its General Assistance (GA) program for individuals; as a result, 6,000 individuals lost their GA benefits (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1992).

In rural areas throughout the state, lack of affordable housing and poverty are also serious and growing problems. For example, in Cook County in Northeastern Minnesota, median rents increased 175% from 1980 to 1990 (Arrowhead Regional Development Commission, 1997). The loss of manufacturing jobs, timber, farm, and mining industries, and other traditional sources of employment in rural areas have led to higher rates of unemployment; in addition, the growth of low-wage work and/or seasonal jobs has increased poverty. From 1979 to 1986, AFDC caseloads in Greater Minnesota increased by 36%, while caseloads in the Twin Cities declined slightly (Minnesota State Planning Agency, 1988).

Available Data on Homelessness:

In August of 1985, the State Department of Economic Security (now the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning) began conducting a quarterly one-night survey of programs that provide emergency and transitional shelter. The survey does not count persons sleeping on the street, in cars, in abandoned buildings, or inappropriately doubled up.

The data provided by the quarterly one-night census reveals striking growth in homelessness in Minnesota over the 12-year period, as well as dramatic changes in the composition of the homeless population. The number of persons in shelters on one night has quadrupled, from 1,165 in August of 1985 to 5,462 people in August of 1997. The most dramatic increase has

been in the number of children, who represent 49% of the sheltered homeless population. The number of children in shelters in Minnesota has increased by 733% in 12 years. The total number of persons turned away from shelter has almost tripled during this time period. In 1985, children made up 18% of those turned away from shelter; in 1987, 53% of those turned away from shelter were children. The growth is particularly notable in rural areas. Between 1985 and 1997, the increase in the number of person receiving shelter in rural areas of the state (387%) was greater than in urban areas of the state (364%).

It is important to note that policy changes have impacted who is eligible for shelter, and therefore who and how many people are sheltered. For example, when the state of Minnesota eliminated its work readiness program (a training and assistance program for unemployed persons), counties lost their state reimbursement for shelter for single unemployed persons. Hennepin County responded by disqualifying single, non-disabled persons from shelter. The county instead opened a facility called "Warm Waiting Space," where people can stay inside, but have no place to sleep. It is routinely filled to capacity.

Perspective: Sue Watlov Phillips, Executive Director, Elim Transitional Housing

NCH: What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act?

S.W.P: In Minnesota, we passed our state transitional housing bill in 1984, and Hennepin County began funding transitional housing in 1984. By 1985, we were funding transitional housing in urban, suburban, and rural communities. In 1986, we passed a Single Room Occupancy bill. In 1987, we passed changes to our mental health act to include housing. From 1983 to 1987, we pushed our local HUD office to make available vacant HUD and public housing units and were successful in accessing both. Our Congressman, Representative Vento, was an author of McKinney and utilized many of these examples in the development of the bill.

> "...the American people must demand that homelessness must end, and commit resources to make affordable housing available to everyone."

As a Board member of the National Coalition for the Homeless, I impelled NCH in the development of McKinney to focus on the right to housing versus the right to shelter; to ensure that Indian Reservations, rural and suburban communities, and small cities would at least get some McKinney money through the Emergency Shelter Grant money, since they probably would not do as well in national competition; and to utilize the broadest definition of homelessness (the original definition was not discriminatory toward smaller communities). Also, Elim Transitional Housing was a model utilized in the development of supportive housing and incorporated when "turn key" transitional housing was accepted.

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness been over the past 10 years?

S.W.P.: I've been a Board member of NCH since 1986. I was also a founding Board member of the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless in 1984, and President from 1984 to 1994. I'm currently legislative chair and treasurer of the Minnesota Coalition. I've been Director of Elim Transitional Housing since 1983, and a board member of the Metropolitan Council on Affordable Housing since 1988. I've been involved in the expansion of transitional housing across the country, and work nationally on rural homelessness issues.

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the Act at that time? What is the significance of the McKinney Act now?

S.W.P.: In 1987, the significance of McKinney was to bring national attention and federal resources besides FEMA to communities.

Now, McKinney still provides needed resources to communities. The movement to formula-based funding provides the possibility of more equal distribution of these funds, especially to rural, small city, and suburban communities. It is forcing communities, through the Continuum of Care and Consolidated Planning, to think comprehensively about housing and homelessness. However, the McKinney Act has also created an industry, which is dangerous in that it is self-promoting and where people see homelessness as part of our society and where they plan to spend their careers.

"We need a major infusion of at least $50-100 billion per year into affordable housing. We must plan to create livable income jobs, health care that is affordable and accessible, and coordinated transportation systems. We must enforce civil rights laws and end discrimination."

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

S.W.P.: In part, because of the apathy and acceptance by the American people that homelessness is part of our society. Also, a lack of planning in addressing the impact of farm foreclosures, mine closures, loss of manufacturing jobs, loss of timber and fish industries, NAFTA, and the growth of service jobs which do not provide adequate resources for people to obtain housing in rural areas and small cities. Homelessness has also persisted because of inequities in tax appropriations, and tax expenditure dollars to support upper- and middle-income housing. There has been a lack of planning to create livable income jobs and housing -- economic development must include affordable housing for employees at wages they will earn. Homelessness continues because of lack of health care that is affordable and accessible, lack of coordinated transportation systems in suburban and rural areas, and civil rights violations, discrimination, and NIMBY.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

S.W.P.: I see significant increases in homeless youth, families, singles with disabilities, elderly people, the working poor, in all sectors -- urban, suburban, rural, small cities, and Indian Reservations. This will be due to low-wage jobs, lack of significant investment in affordable housing, changes in public and Section 8 housing, and welfare reform.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this nation to end homelessness?

S.W.P.: First, the American people must demand that homelessness must end, and commit resources to make affordable housing available to everyone. We must also review all trade agreements to see the impact on our jobs and wages, and to ensure that no job loss or wage decrease occurs. We need equity in tax appropriations and tax expenditure dollars in the use of housing subsidies, so that everyone has housing. We need a major infusion of at least $50-100 billion per year into affordable housing. We must plan to create livable income jobs, health care that is affordable and accessible, and coordinated transportation systems. We must enforce civil rights laws and end discrimination. We need to provide the resources to adequately address homelessness in communities and coordinate plans to end homelessness through statewide planning and a national plan to make a place to call home a reality for everyone in our country.

PERSPECTIVES ON 10 YEARS OF HOMELESSNESS

been in the number of children, who represent 49% of the sheltered homeless population. The number of children in shelters in Minnesota has increased by 733% in 12 years. The total number of persons turned away from shelter has almost tripled during this time period. In 1985, children made up 18% of those turned away from shelter; in 1987, 53% of those turned away from shelter were children. The growth is particularly notable in rural areas. Between 1985 and 1997, the increase in the number of person receiving shelter in rural areas of the state (387%) was greater than in urban areas of the state (364%).

It is important to note that policy changes have impacted who is eligible for shelter, and therefore who and how many people are sheltered. For example, when the state of Minnesota eliminated its work readiness program (a training and assistance program for unemployed persons), counties lost their state reimbursement for shelter for single unemployed persons. Hennepin County responded by disqualifying single, non-disabled persons from shelter. The county instead opened a facility called "Warm Waiting Space," where people can stay inside, but have no place to sleep. It is routinely filled to capacity.

Perspective: Sue Watlov Phillips, Executive Director, Elim Transitional Housing

NCH: What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act?

S.W.P: In Minnesota, we passed our state transitional housing bill in 1984, and Hennepin County began funding transitional housing in 1984. By 1985, we were funding transitional housing in urban, suburban, and rural communities. In 1986, we passed a Single Room Occupancy bill. In 1987, we passed changes to our mental health act to include housing. From 1983 to 1987, we pushed our local HUD office to make available vacant HUD and public housing units and were successful in accessing both. Our Congressman, Representative Vento, was an author of McKinney and utilized many of these examples in the development of the bill.

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As a Board member of the National Coalition for the Homeless, I impelled NCH in the development of McKinney to focus on the right to housing versus the right to shelter; to ensure that Indian Reservations, rural and suburban communities, and small cities would at least get some McKinney money through the Emergency Shelter Grant money, since they probably would not do as well in national competition; and to utilize the broadest definition of homelessness (the original definition was not discriminatory toward smaller communities). Also, Elim Transitional Housing was a model utilized in the development of supportive housing and incorporated when "turn key" transitional housing was accepted.

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness been over the past 10 years?

S.W.P.: I've been a Board member of NCH since 1986. I was also a founding Board member of the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless in 1984, and President from 1984 to 1994. I'm currently legislative chair and treasurer of the Minnesota Coalition. I've been Director of Elim Transitional Housing since 1983, and a board member of the Metropolitan Council on Affordable Housing since 1988. I've been involved in the expansion of transitional housing across the country, and work nationally on rural homelessness issues.

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the Act at that time? What is the significance of the McKinney Act now?

S.W.P.: In 1987, the significance of McKinney was to bring national attention and federal resources besides FEMA to communities.

Now, McKinney still provides needed resources to communities. The movement to formula-based funding provides the possibility of more equal distribution of these funds, especially to rural, small city, and suburban communities. It is forcing communities, through the Continuum of Care and Consolidated Planning, to think comprehensively about housing and homelessness. However, the McKinney Act has also created an industry, which is dangerous in that it is self-promoting and where people see homelessness as part of our society and where they plan to spend their careers.

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NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

S.W.P.: I see significant increases in homeless youth, families, singles with disabilities, elderly people, the working poor, in all sectors -- urban, suburban, rural, small cities, and Indian Reservations. This will be due to low-wage jobs, lack of significant investment in affordable housing, changes in public and Section 8 housing, and welfare reform.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this nation to end homelessness?

S.W.P.: First, the American people must demand that homelessness must end, and commit resources to make affordable housing available to everyone. We must also review all trade agreements to see the impact on our jobs and wages, and to ensure that no job loss or wage decrease occurs. We need equity in tax appropriations and tax expenditure dollars in the use of housing subsidies, so that everyone has housing. We need a major infusion of at least $50-100 billion per year into affordable housing. We must plan to create livable income jobs, health care that is affordable and accessible, and coordinated transportation systems. We must enforce civil rights laws and end discrimination. We need to provide the resources to adequately address homelessness in communities and coordinate plans to end homelessness through statewide planning and a national plan to make a place to call home a reality for everyone in our country.

State of New York

Homelessness At a Glance	1987	1997
Est. Persons Homeless in Publicly-funded Shelters/Year	100,000	140,000
	1989	**1997**
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR*	$8.27	$9.04
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR*	$9.81	$11.52

*Figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents

Origins of Homelessness:

Lack of affordable housing and increasing poverty are two of the major factors underlying the growth in homelessness in New York.

For example, between 1975 and 1989, the shortage of affordable housing in the Buffalo area more than doubled (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1992). By 1988, there was a shortage of 25,700 affordable housing units in Buffalo -- nearly two low-income renters for every low cost unit. In 1980, there were 2.487 million renter-occupied units in New York State with rents under $300 per month -- rents that are affordable to welfare households. By 1990, this number had decreased to 753,000.

At the same time, stagnating wages and erosion of public assistance benefits put housing out of reach for increasing numbers of New Yorkers. Between 1975 and 1992, the value of the average welfare benefits for a family of three in New York dropped by 43% (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 1993). Furthermore, housing allowances for welfare recipients have not enabled poor families to maintain stable housing. In 1989, 44,135 welfare households in New York paid rents that were one and one-half times their shelter allowance; by 1996, that number had more than doubled, increasing to 110,979 households (New York State Department of Social Services). Shelter allowances fall short of actual rents for these families by $150-300 per month. Housing allowances for welfare recipients in New York state have not been increased since 1988, when they received a small increase. Currently, housing costs for welfare households in New York grow by $80,000,000 per year, with no corresponding increase in benefit levels.

Lack of affordable housing and poverty are serious and growing problems throughout the state. Although there are many urban areas in New York, 44 of its 62 counties are "officially" designated as rural (Fitchen, 1992). Factors contributing to homelessness in rural areas include the loss of manufacturing jobs and the transition to a service-based economy, a decline in homeownership, and a shrinking supply of affordable rental housing. In addition, rural communities find it very difficult to recover from natural disasters, such as serious floods and tornadoes, the consequences of which can last for many years.

Poor households in rural areas of the state have faced dramatically increasing housing costs over the past decade. For example, between 1989 and 1996, the number of welfare households forced to pay rents that are one and one half times their shelter allowance increased from 129 households to 479 households in Cattaraugus County, an increase of 271%; from 87 households to 298 households in Tioga County, an increase of 243%; from 47 households to 136 households in Seneca County, an increase of 189%; and from 193 to 518 households in Wayne county, an increase of 168%. These families have very little money left over to pay for utilities,

transportation, child care, school supplies, and other necessities, and are at high risk of becoming homeless.

Available Data on Homelessness:

In 1983, there were approximately 20,200 people in shelters in the state of New York on any given night; 16,700 of these people were in New York City (NYS Department of Social Services, New York State Department of Homeless Services). Today, approximately 32,000 people are in shelters in the state of New York on any given night, including 24,500 in New York City (Coalition for the Homeless).

In 1987, an estimated 100,000 persons spent some time in publicly funded-shelters during the year. By 1997, that number had grown to 140,000 -- over half of which were children and runaway youth. Government data suggest that over 236,000 homeless New Yorkers receive some form of government aid over the course of a year (NYS Department of State). In upstate New York, some shelters turn away three people for every one they shelter (Coalition for the Homeless, 1997).

Perspective: Shelly Nortz, Director of State Policy, New York State Coalition for the Homeless

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness over the past 10 years? What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act?

S.N.: I've been working for the Coalition for ten years. Before that, I ran a shelter. I was involved not just with pushing for the passage of McKinney, but also increasing funding for it, making amendments to the law to improve it, and the early monitoring efforts to see how McKinney money was spent in New York. I was on loan to the National Coalition for the Homeless as staff to do organizing in the northern New England states and in Florida. We carried with us model legislation based on McKinney that was designed for adoption by states. I was involved with the drafting and promoting of that legislation.

> "We know how to solve the problem of homelessness. We do it every day for a lot of people. We just don't have the resources to do it for everyone."

Since then, I've worked mostly on New York State policy in the areas of homelessness and related issues, including welfare, housing, mental health, education for homeless children and youth, Medicaid, and the list goes on. There was a point when I was involved in drafting the National Housing Trust Fund legislation (which would have essentially guaranteed housing assistance for the poorest Americans) in concert with the National Low Income Housing Coalition. We brought the New York Housing Now! delegation to Washington, D.C.

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the Act at that time? What is the significance of the McKinney Act now?

S.N.: At the time, it was a critical turning point in acknowledging the existence of the crisis that homelessness had become. But it ended up being extremely limited in scope. Only one part of the Homeless Persons' Survival Act was adopted -- only the emergency section was addressed in legislation. It was grossly underfunded and has remained so. Where it really fell apart was in housing, welfare, mental health... the permanent remedies were ignored.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

S.N.: Primarily, the lack of will to support poor people with adequate incomes and housing assistance -- both of which, to be effective, must be federal policy priorities.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

S.N.: The experience in New York is that we will see two powerful dynamics. First, we will see a slow and steady increase in demand for emergency shelter. It is already evident, but we expect it to grow as welfare reform initiatives kick in. And most of the impact will not be the result of initiatives that permanently remove benefits, but the type that intermittently take benefits away or make it difficult to obtain them in the first place.

"The vast majority of homeless people are there because of economics, and they leave when we can scrape up the resources to help them out. The people who are most vulnerable and the most debilitated are the ones who are left in the condition of institutionalized homelessness."

There is a second trend that we had not anticipated but are already observing, particularly in areas of the state outside of New York City. Emergency, transitional, and permanent housing for very poor people and homeless people rely heavily on funding streams that exist because of a person's eligibility for welfare. Because of welfare reform, the amount of government money going to those programs is plummeting and causing funding short-falls. Some shelters that used to receive 80% of their funding from government reimbursements now only receive 20% through these sources. We have seen shelters close and we expect additional closings. We also see a threat to bond financing for some of the special needs housing -- housing for homeless persons with AIDS, mentally ill persons, and transitional housing . What makes these programs work is the regular revenue stream to pay the debt service. Without that revenue stream, they won't be able to make those payments. It also places the tax-credit projects at risk.

Another trend that we are seeing more and more of is government officials creating new hurdles for shelter eligibility for homeless people. The consequence is tragedy. Whole families repeatedly denied shelter, as we are seeing at the EAU [Emergency Assistance Unit] in New York City, people freezing to death -- we have many instances of this every winter, as well as of people burning to death in makeshift housing and shanties.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this country to end homelessness?

S.N.: First, a change of heart, from the proposition that there is an insatiable appetite for punishing poor people, to the idea that meeting basic needs is fundamentally what America is about. I think, in the absence of that, what we can do on housing, income security, and mental health policy ends up being incremental. We know how to solve the problem of homelessness. We do it every day for a lot of people. We just don't have the resources to do it for everyone.

The truth about that is borne out in New York, where only a tiny fraction of people who are in homeless shelters are there for many years. The vast majority of homeless people are there because of economics, and they leave when we can scrape up the resources to help them out. The people who are most vulnerable and the most debilitated are the ones who are left in the condition of institutionalized homelessness. Anyone who looks at that with their eyes open recognizes that there is merit in making the investments to help those people get the housing, services and income assistance to which they are entitled. When they see it work, regardless of

their political affiliation, they are willing to make the investment -- just not large enough. For example, in New York there is a city-state partnership program called New York, New York which provides housing to homeless mentally ill persons through construction and other strategies. After its implementation, the sheltered single homeless population in New York went from over 11,000 per night to 5,700 per night. The program was initiated in 1990; it has taken seven years and now we need to add roughly 10,000 more units if we are to keep the shelter system from exploding. We know that for real solutions, it takes time -- it takes a while to get a pipeline of housing going.

"In New York City, a shelter bed for a single homeless person costs $23,000 per year; for a single homeless person with mental illness, it costs $28,000 per year. The price of shelter for a three-person family in New York City is $36,000 per year. In Westchester, it's much worse: the average family homeless experience costs $60,000-$70,000. For a fraction of those expenses, we can build units of housing for people to live in - we do it all the time."

We can produce housing that has a tremendous impact on the lives of human beings and reduces expenses for tax payers. In New York City, a shelter bed for a single homeless person costs $23,000 per year; for a single homeless person with mental illness, it costs $28,000 per year. The price of shelter for a three-person family in New York City is $36,000 per year. In Westchester, it's much worse: the average family homeless experience costs $60,000-$70,000. For a fraction of those expenses, we can build units of housing for people to live in - we do it all the time. Losing Section 8 incremental units has been tragic. It makes all of the housing solutions to homelessness difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. We have over 100,000 households who are at real risk of homelessness right now -- they could all avoid the experience if we could just get Section 8 assistance for them.

State of Virginia

Homelessness At a Glance	1986	1995
Shelter Capacity	700	5,000 (1997)
Est. Number of Persons in Shelters/Year	35,563	51,852
Est. Number of Children in Shelter/Year	3,912 (11%)	14,000 (27%)
	1989	**1997**
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR*	$8.65	$10.28
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR*	$10.19	$12.16

*Figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents.

Homelessness has increased dramatically in the state of Virginia over the past decade.

In 1986, the Virginia Coalition for the Homeless conducted its first survey of shelter providers. At that time, the state had 27 shelters providing 500 beds, mostly to single adult men. In 1988, almost half of the state's shelters were those that had opened between 1986 and 1988. In 1994, there were 4,480 shelter beds, yet 40,413 persons were turned away from shelter during the year. In 1995, there were 128 shelters in Virginia providing 5,000 beds, most of them for women and children.

The number of children sheltered in Virginia has increased by over 258%, from 3,912 in 1985 to 14,000 in 1996. Children now make up almost a third of the state's sheltered population.

Ten years ago, the average stay in a shelter was 10-14 days; it is currently 30-45 days for families and children in emergency shelters, and three months to two years for those in transitional housing. Still, only 36% of people exiting shelters find permanent housing.

According to the most recent survey, homeless service providers in Virginia ranked affordable housing as the most essential service needed by homeless people in their area; they ranked low wages and benefit levels as the primary reason for homelessness, followed by eviction, unemployment, and family violence.

Neither full-time minimum-wage work nor welfare benefits protect people in Virginia from homelessness. In 1994, 48% of persons entering homeless shelters in Virginia were working; 35% were employed full-time. As of September 1997, family heads of households moving from welfare to work earned $5.69 per hour for full-time employment; an hourly wage of $12.16 is needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent. In 1994, 22% of persons in homeless shelters were receiving welfare (AFDC). The maximum welfare grant (AFDC) for a family of three provides just over half of the cost of a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 1997).

Sue Capers, Coordinator for Public Policy, Virginia Coalition for the Homeless

NCH: What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act? How have you been involved in homelessness over the past 10 years?

S.C.: I advocated at the local level for the passage of the McKinney Act.

I have been involved in homelessness for almost 20 years. I joined a small group in Virginia who were working to open the first homeless shelter in Richmond in the late 1970s. That shelter, Emergency Shelter, Inc. opened in 1979/or 80. In the following years, homelessness and poverty increased in Virginia and emergency and transitional shelters opened to try to keep up with requests. Hundreds of volunteers came forward to serve in soup kitchens, clothing rooms, and winter shelters, but demand far outstripped services. During these years I worked in direct services in shelters and soup kitchens and on Boards and with planning/organizing groups.

> "...we have tried to break the cycle of homelessness by fixing people rather than systems. We preach money management to families that don't have enough to manage. We encourage work when jobs don't pay enough to live. We cut benefits when we know affordable housing is unavailable. We blame deinstitutionalization when promised community services were never delivered."

In 1986 I called a statewide meeting of shelter providers and the Virginia Coalition for the Homeless was formed. I served as its first Coordinator and Board President until 1994. For the past three years and presently, I serve as the Coordinator for Public Policy - working on issues of homelessness and poverty through state legislation, lobbying, and building constituent support.

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the Act at that time? What is the significance of the McKinney Act now?

S.C: The McKinney Act raised the issue of homelessness to the national level and recognized homelessness as a national crisis. It brought, I believe, hope and apprehension. Hope, that the causes of homelessness would receive attention and solutions. That poverty, health care, and housing would be addressed. Apprehension, that another class of housing, shelters, would become permanent. That the next generation would accept homelessness as a normal situation for many individuals and families. That words like "bag lady," "street person," would become all too familiar.

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Now, because suitable, affordable housing is not available for low income people, because wages are inadequate at the bottom rung, because of a lack of health and other basic services, funding through the McKinney Act is essential to meet emergency shelter and service needs.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

S.C.: Because we have tried to break the cycle of homelessness by fixing people rather than systems. We preach money management to families that don't have enough to manage. We

encourage work when jobs don't pay enough to live. We cut benefits when we know affordable housing is unavailable. We blame deinstitutionalization when promised community services were never delivered.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

S.C.: Homelessness continuing to increase because the root causes of homelessness have not been addressed. And growing numbers of women with children homeless due to welfare changes.

"We need to look at the facts of poverty and homelessness -- we need to stop blaming the victims."

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this country to end homelessness?

S.C.: We need to address the system causes of homelessness: wages, benefit levels, housing, and health care. We either pay individuals a living wage or benefits if eligible or we provide basic necessities to them -- one or the other -- or we have individuals and families on the street. We need to look at the facts of poverty and homelessness -- we need to stop blaming the victims.

State of Wisconsin

Homelessness At a Glance		
	1987	**1997**
Persons Homeless in State-Subsidized Shelters/One Night*	11,000	24,600
	1989	**1997**
Hourly wage needed for 1-br FMR**	$7.12	$9.04
Hourly wage needed for 2-br FMR**	$8.51	$10.66

*Figures from State of Wisconsin Division of Housing

**Figures represent average state metro Fair Market Rents.

Origins of Homelessness:

Lack of affordable housing and poverty are two major factors underlying the doubling of persons served in state-subsidized shelters in Wisconsin.

For example, in 1975 in Milwaukee, there were 10,000 fewer low rent units than there were low income renter households (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1992). By 1988, there was a shortage of 38,400 units -- area's affordable housing shortage had more than tripled, with more than two low income renters for each low rent unit.

At same time, stagnating wages and eroding public assistance put housing further out of reach for many low income households in Wisconsin. Between 1975 and 1992, the value of the average welfare benefit (AFDC) for a family of three in Wisconsin decreased by 42% (Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law, 1993). Currently, a family of three would have to spend almost its entire monthly welfare grant (TANF) to afford a two-bedroom unit at Fair Market Rent. Full-time minimum wage work would not provide much relief for this family, as more than double the minimum wage is needed to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent.

Available Data on Homelessness:

The State of Wisconsin collects data on the shelter programs funded through its shelter subsidy program. Between 1987 and 1997, the number of people staying in state-subsidized shelters more than doubled, increasing from 11,000 to 24,600 people.

In 1996, 35% of those staying in state-subsidized shelters were children under the age of 18. Primary reasons for homelessness included low or no income (30.4%), eviction (17.8%), and family violence (20.4%).

Judith Wilcox, State Coordinator for Homeless Programs, Wisconsin

NCH: What has your involvement in homelessness been over the past 10 years?

J.W.: In 1985, I was introduced to homelessness in Milwaukee through the Office of Mental Health. I was involved as the community housing and services person; my job was to assist organizations and communities in developing community-based programs for persons coming out of institutional settings - small, scattered-site supportive housing models. I spent half of my time in the Office of Mental Health and half in the Bureau of Long Term Support.

"Maybe because housing is such an enormous and expensive issue, we don' t deal with it. We hope someone else will. But the deduction for taxes and interest that single family home owners are able to deduct vastly exceeds any funds ever allocated for subsidized housing - even for just one year. You have to wonder, where in the hell are our priorities?"

Then, Claire Stapleton Concord was hired to do a study of the homeless population in Milwaukee. Information was gathered over a six-week period in the streets, in shelters, and in food pantries to really get a picture of homelessness.

In 1987, I took a leave of absence from the Department of Health and Social Services and went to Africa, and when I came back in 1989, the job that was open was the Mental Health Services for the Homeless program, which later became the PATH (Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness) program. Later in that year, I took over all of the state-administered homeless programs, and also providing staff support for legislators, the legislative council study committee on homelessness in 1989 and 1990. This council provided formerly homeless persons, advocates, and providers with an opportunity to examine homelessness in Wisconsin and make recommendations on how it should be addressed. Several of the recommendations were implemented, including the Interest-Bearing Real Estate Trust Accounts, which provides approximately $400,000 for existing homeless programs, and the initiation of a state-funded transitional housing program in 1992.

In 1992, the homeless programs were transferred from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Division of Housing, and I've been here since then.

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the Act at that time? What is the significance of the McKinney Act now?

J.W: When McKinney was passed, I was in Africa. You weren't homeless in Africa; if you went to a village, all you had to do was say your name and you had a place to stay, because chances were that you had some relatives there. The country I was in had a predominantly Muslim population and they are very invested in charity and hospitality.

In Wisconsin, the real effort [to address homelessness] began in the early 80s - in Madison, Milwaukee, and Green Bay - task forces, advocates, the faith community, and traditional service providers worked on very low-budget operations only doing emergency shelter in small facilities, or offering vouchers, with little aid and support from the state. But in 1987-1989, there was a more significant influx of dollars. It was good in that the funds were available for other things in addition to emergency shelter. We could do some things in the late 80s and 90s that made a difference because the money was flexible and could be used for things like prevention. There was money for unique kinds of things, like supportive services, and we were able to head off homelessness for some folks. We are still able to do that.

For the first few years, HUD couldn't figure out how they wanted to administer those dollars, and consequently, it was confusing and difficult to avail ourselves of dollars in the competition for funding in the early years. Wisconsin has become more successful recently. Now we have wonderful relationships with our HUD folks in DC and in the state; we are fortunate to have such an understanding and communication. There's a degree of trust that helps us administer the McKinney money. We use it the way it seems to be most beneficial. I would love to see us have more funding, especially for supportive housing and longer-term housing. I think that block grants will make a difference for Wisconsin; we have always been a state that works from a philosophy of the importance of local control.

"...there doesn't seem to be an awareness that housing is an important part of making welfare reform work. In order to maintain a job, you have to have a place to live. To maintain your family, you have to have a place to live. Why it never occurred to any body when they were putting together the welfare reform proposal, I don't know."

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

J.W.: Because we didn't hear the screams of pain when the budget passed. There has been no increase in the number of units of subsidized housing. People cannot afford housing and that is only going to get worse. We can't blame welfare reform, there are things about welfare reform that are good. But the vast majority of the low-income population cannot afford to rent housing for less than 50% of their income.

And it takes not only an upfront housing subsidy, but an operating and long-term subsidy. It can be done. We haven't paid enough attention to this.

I was having a conversation with a local realtor the other day, and he told me that in the Madison area, we have a two-year supply of $250,000-plus homes. I said, maybe it's time to stop building them and start building something else. The market that is driving the production of the higher end units is people with two incomes, no kids, who can afford a $3,500 per month housing payment. And this is in Wisconsin - I can't imagine what it is like in New York!

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NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

J.W.: We are seeing an increase in the number of homeless families, children, and the working poor in shelters. And concurrent with that, there doesn't seem to be an awareness that housing is an important part of making welfare reform work. In order to maintain a job, you have to have a place to live. To maintain your family, you have to have a place to live. Why it never occurred to any body when they were putting together the welfare reform proposal, I don't know.

Maybe because housing is such an enormous and expensive issue, we don' t deal with it. We hope someone else will. But the deduction for taxes and interest that single family home owners are able to deduct vastly exceeds any funds ever allocated for subsidized housing - even for just one year. You have to wonder, where in the hell are our priorities?

In 1989, at Housing Now, we made such a big deal that Section 8 was not increased. Now, in 1997, the budget passes, not only with no increases, but with less money than we had. Sure,

there are some things wrong with publicly assisted housing, but rather than fix them, we throw it all away.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this country to end homelessness?

J.W.: We need to recognize that every working person needs to earn a living wage. It's different in different parts of the country, but it is not $5.15/hour. In Wisconsin, it's $8-10/hour. If we want people to work, we are all going to have to pay the price. We must recognize that housing is no one government's entire responsibility, and no one organization's responsibility. It is all of ours. To have the federal government say it's a local problem is bullshit. It's all of our problem.

PERSPECTIVES ON 10 YEARS OF HOMELESSNESS

Perspective: Carol Fennelly
Former Director, Community for Creative Non-Violence

NCH: What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act?

C.F.: I was the person at the phones setting up meetings with about 300 Members of Congress, going to meetings, coordinating meetings. It was quite a process, there were no cell phones back then. And, in fact, McKinney passed and we were there when Jim Wright signed the bill. We coordinated dinner parties with Tony Coelho and Jim Wright, and other Members of Congress to get them on board. At first, we couldn't get a meeting with Wright, and so I sat in his office until I got a meeting date. After the meeting, he was wonderful, he took the bill under his wing. McKinney was passed and funded quicker than any other bill at that time.

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness been over the past 10 years?

C.F.: I lived in a homeless shelter, CCNV, for 17 years. I left there a few years ago, I was pretty burned out. I started doing other things to pay the rent. I now work at Sojourner's Magazine.

> "There was a certain moment in the 1980s that helped to raise the consciousness of America. It was a funeral for a homeless veteran. We pushed it with the military, and he got a funeral at Arlington National Cemetery with a 21 gun salute. It was on the front page of every newspaper. That took "homeless" out of it and put a name, a face, a life, on this person and on the issue. People said "here is one of our own, and he ended up homeless, too." That woke up a lot of people. I fear that one day, I'll wake up and see that funeral, and it will be the funeral of a homeless child who froze on the streets. It'll take something like that to make people get it. "

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the Act at that time? What is the significance of the McKinney Act now?

C.F.: At the time, it was the first comprehensive homeless bill to get through Congress in the Reagan years - the first to make it. I think now, it is losing money, and losing people on the Hill.

When I travel across the country, I come to places where people can point to their shelter and say "we got that with McKinney money." It's hard for me, personally, to be on the outside of the issue. There is little left of the work I did for so many years. McKinney now seems to be one piece of good that came out of all that. When Jim Wright signed the bill, we got the pen. I framed it and gave it as a birthday gift to Mitch. It's now in the George Washington University Library Special Collection.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

C.F.: Because the political will doesn't exist to make it end. I agree with Willie Brown when he says that homelessness can't be solved anymore. The problem is now so old, and so ingrained in American culture. People have been on the streets for so long that their spirits have been stolen. It's not on the radar anymore -- people don't care. The social fabric has been irreparably damaged.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

C.F.: Homelessness will be getting worse, especially with welfare reform. I see more and more families on the street. There was a certain moment in the 1980s that helped to raise the

consciousness of America. It was a funeral for a homeless veteran. We pushed it with the military, and he got a funeral at Arlington National Cemetery with a 21 gun salute. It was on the front page of every newspaper. That took "homeless" out of it and put a name, a face, a life, on this person and on the issue. People said "here is one of our own, and he ended up homeless, too." That woke up a lot of people. I fear that one day, I'll wake up and see that funeral, and it will be the funeral of a homeless child who froze on the streets. It'll take something like that to make people get it. I see more tragedy and death on our streets with this Republican Congress. They want to bury the poor.

"Because the political will doesn't exist to make it end. I agree with Willie Brown when he says that homelessness can't be solved anymore. The problem is now so old, and so ingrained in American culture. People have been on the streets for so long that their spirits have been stolen. It's not on the radar anymore -- people don't care. The social fabric has been irreparably damaged."

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this country to end homelessness?

C.F.: Health care, mental health care, housing, and a huge influx of money and energy. We need jobs that pay a living wage. Job creation. In America, the people with all the money own all the jobs. We need to create jobs so people can be paid the wages they need to live.

Perspective: Maria Foscarinas
Executive Director, National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

NCH: What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act?

M.F.: I lobbied - I made a lot of lobbying visits. I also played a role in drafting the bill. One proposed before the McKinney Act, called the Homeless Person's Survival Act, was something that a lot of different people from different organizations were putting together. My contribution, as I had just arrived in Washington, was to pull it all together, put it into different parts, organize it, and make it into something that became a legislative proposal. Then my role was to take it to the Hill and begin looking for supporters for it. I lobbied mainly with Mitch.

NCH: What was the response at the time, of the people you presented the proposal to? How did they react to you, to the idea, to homelessness?

M.F.: It was very interesting how people reacted. I initially approached those who I thought would be the most supportive, the liberal Democrats, and they all said at first, "Well, you know this is a very good idea, and we're so glad you're doing this, and of course this is the right thing to do, but the political reality is that there is an election coming, and homeless people don't vote." They were pretty blunt about it, which was very surprising to me. What eventually happened is I just kept making more and more visits and eventually one person decided to sponsor it and introduce it and make it into a bill, and that was Mickey Leland, and once you get one person it gets easier to get another person, and more people sign up. And then, in the Senate, Gore was the first person to sign up.

> "At the time, I felt very impatient, like 'What do you mean, this is all we get? This is not enough, this is not what we really need.' But it was very difficult to get. So, it's important to acknowledge that it was gotten, despite the fact that it was difficult. That's important -- you've got to acknowledge the difficulty of getting something in order to give yourself the courage to persist and to be able to believe that it's possible to do it again, and that despite the odds, you can succeed, you can make progress."

NCH: It seems like the same thing happens now, we approach Democrats, and we get the same line -- if it's not an election, it's the "political environment," they're in the minority, etc.

M.F.: Right, well there's always a reason. I mean they weren't in the minority then, at least not in the House. But, the interesting thing was that it turned out that the initial assumptions of who would be helpful were wrong. And sometimes Republicans would be more supportive than Democrats, and people saw the issue in different ways. And some Republicans saw it as a religious issue, and supported us for that reason.

NCH: Now it seems like a big reason for some of the attacks on McKinney is that as a Federal program, it's not necessary or appropriate, especially in the age of devolution. Was that one of the arguments that you had to deal with?

M.F.: Well, yes. There was certainly the argument that homelessness was not a political issue at all, certainly not a national issue. If it was a political issue at all, it was for local government to deal with, or it wasn't at all appropriate for a political response; it was for private, non-profit responses. That was the position of the Reagan Administration at the time, and that was the

position taken by the predecessor to the Interagency Council on the Homeless, which was called the Federal Task Force on Homelessness.

NCH: What has been your involvement since then, over the past 10 years?

M.F.: Some of it has focused on the McKinney Act amendments and appropriations. The McKinney Act has changed over the past 10 years significantly, and I've had some involvement with that. And enforcement -- monitoring enforcement has been something I've been quite involved with. In other words, once you get a law like the McKinney Act passed, there is a whole other effort required to actually get the benefits to the intended beneficiaries. So, monitoring compliance, and then litigating in some cases, to enforce it. Initially, that mainly involved monitoring the federal agencies because the federal agencies were not eager to support the programs, especially given the stands of the Administration. So, there were some suits against the federal agencies, one of which is still on-going, that's the Surplus Property litigation. It's on-going in the sense that there's still an injunction in place which we monitor, and we've been back to court to enforce it. It's improved now with the Clinton administration.

> "...we need to broaden our constituency. It can't just be us, it can't just be a voice in the wilderness. We need to reach out within and across the advocacy area to other groups that could potentially be allies."

NCH: What for you was the significance of the passage of the McKinney Act at that time and then what is the significance, as you see it, of the McKinney Act now?

M.F.: Well, at the time that it was passed, the McKinney Act was the first federal legislation addressing homelessness, the first major federal legislation. It was the first real acknowledgement that homelessness was a federal/national problem and a federal responsibility, so that was significant. To me, at the time, it also signified the success of this sort of larger strategy that I had in mind, which was an approach that included different steps. I saw this as the first step. And the next steps, after the emergency measures, were supposed to be the preventive measures and the long-term solutions. So, it seemed like the passage of the McKinney Act meant successful completion of the first step. And that's what I thought. I thought the McKinney Act was inadequate at the time, I thought that clearly it was an emergency measure and that was not what we needed, so I had a mixed reaction personally at the time.

NCH: And now, what do you think the significance is, in it's altered, amended and, in some areas, expanded form?

M.F.: Well, now, I guess, with the passage of time, I see it as a more major accomplishment than I thought at the time. At the time, I felt very impatient, like "What do you mean, this is all we get? This is not enough, this is not what we really need." But it was very difficult to get. So, it's important to acknowledge that it was gotten, despite the fact that it was difficult. That's important -- you've got to acknowledge the difficulty of getting something in order to give yourself the courage to persist and to be able to believe that it's possible to do it again, and that despite the odds, you can succeed, you can make progress.

NCH: That's a good message.

M.F.: I realize that now. It's important to remember this because I know that people can often get discouraged. I mean, I, myself, can get discouraged. It's important to remind ourselves. At

that time, it was a very discouraging time, it was during the Reagan crisis. People were very demoralized. And yet we were able to achieve this, so it is possible to move forward. So that's one point. Also, the McKinney Act has been amended and expanded. It's been amended for the good. It's much more aimed at longer term relief. Initially, I thought what we really needed to do was press for additional relief outside of the McKinney Act, in the so-called mainstream programs. Now I feel that what we need to do is press for the relief however and wherever we can get it. And it may be that the McKinney Act will be our best vehicle for expansion, given what has gone on in the rest of the programs. The result is what matters, I think.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

M.F.: We haven't addressed its causes, clearly. It's no surprise that it's persisted. What we've done is address the most urgent needs, we've not addressed the causes, and in fact, national policy has done things that have made the causes worse, that has exacerbated them. Housing has been cut drastically, virtually eliminated. Income support has been eliminated, job training programs have been cut. All of these things don't help - they hurt.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

M.F.: Right now the trends are very negative ones. The two major trends are the increasing effort to criminalize homelessness and the increasing prevalence of NIMBY-ism, so it becomes harder for people to exist even on the streets, and it becomes harder for service providers to provide alternatives to the streets. I don't think that these trends necessarily have to continue. I think one potential good outcome would be if we could turn around the same things that are motivating these trends and channel them into more constructive trends. It can happen by bringing in the business community to this effort, because the business community is often behind the efforts to enact these policies. It's clear that criminalization and NIMBY efforts are futile, so the business groups have an interest in solving the problem, for whatever reason. So, that could be a more positive trend for the future.

NCH: What, in your opinion, needs to happen to end homelessness? Affordable housing, living wages, health care, civil rights... How do we make good not only the promises of the McKinney Act, but really work to end homelessness?

M.F.: The policy reforms that need to happen are the ones that you are outlining. But the question that I think you are asking is how those things can happen. I think one thing that needs to happen is that we need to broaden our constituency. It can't just be us, it can't just be a voice in the wilderness. We need to reach out within and across the advocacy area to other groups that could potentially be allies. I think we need to start looking for allies that are not necessarily obvious, like the business groups, and really broaden our base. I also think that we need to become more active in the international arena -- the international human rights arguments and alliances can help reframe the issues.

Perspective: Michael Stoops
Director of Field Organizing, National Coalition for the Homeless

NCH: What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act?

M.S.: I played a role in terms of strategizing , lobbying, non-traditionally. We lived outside for 6 months practicing civil disobedience, educating the media. It was a full time commitment for those six months.

"If we can send a robot to Mars, we should be able to house our citizens. We need leaders, not just a President, but students, churches, CEOs of corporations. While we're trying to end homelessness worldwide, it's good to know that it is possible to end homelessness here. We need to realize that it is possible."

NCH: In what ways did you educate the media?

M.S.: We did a number of special events, our two most notable were "Voices From the Streets," which was a theater troupe that presented their play to Congress at a Senate Building and on the Capitol steps. The second big project was "The Grate American Sleep Out." We had all sorts of politicians and celebrities sleep on the streets for one night in March of '87.

NCH: Which do you think was more successful?

M.S.: I think probably the Sleep Out, mainly because we had 13 members of Congress join us. Unfortunately Stewart McKinney was unable to participate because he was suffering with pneumonia. But people like Joe Kennedy, Mickey Leland, and Marion Barry were there. Overall, it was a lot of hard work and dogged effort in traditional and non-traditional ways.

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the passage of Act at that time?

M.S.: Before the McKinney Act, there was no recognition of the problem by federal government. The government didn't play a role because of Reagan's hands-off -- well more like gloves-off -- approach. But, we felt like everybody had a role to play. And at that time the Democrats controlled both the House and the Senate. We decided that they needed to start acting like Democrats. The McKinney Act prompted the government to say "yes, there is a problem," and it institutionalized federal involvement. Now we have established many programs. Even though McKinney dollars didn't really flow until '88, once the money reached the communities the services could expand. Then the McKinney funds could provide the resources for emergency care for homeless people.

"I'm surprised it [McKinney] is still around. It was never intended to be long-term because we had hoped to tackle the housing problem by now. But since we haven't, the McKinney Act is still very much needed."

NCH: What do you think about the McKinney Act now, ten years later?

M.S.: I'm surprised it is still around. It was never intended to be long-term because we had hoped to tackle the housing problem by now. But since we haven't, the McKinney Act is still very much needed.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

M.S.: We label many homeless people as undeserving, therefore we don't give poor people jobs

and housing. A lot of homeless people need more than services -- they need to have their fundamental problems dealt with. Many people have been homeless for years and there are always newly homeless people. Basically, the government has an inadequate resource commitment to the issue. $823 million for the country? You could spend a quarter of that on just one state.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

M.S.: I don't see any more dollars allocated to addressing the issue. I see homelessness increasing very gradually over the next few years. We won't see the full impact of the welfare-cutoff for 4-5 years. Most homeless people will go back to the old support systems which they haven't had to use for many years. I believe that we will begin to see more intact families living on the streets, whether single or two-parent. Then we'll begin seeing unaccompanied children living in streets. But, it will stop there, because that won't be acceptable to the American people.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this nation to end homelessness?

M.S.: Well, the Clinton administration started off well, by setting homelessness as a federal priority, by doubling the federal homeless budget. What we need is a President, whether it be Bill, Hillary, Bob or whoever else, who is committed to solving the problem. If we can send a robot to Mars, we should be able to house our citizens. We need leaders, not just a President, but students, churches, CEOs of corporations. While we're trying to end homelessness worldwide, it's good to know that it is possible to end homelessness here. We need to realize that it is possible.

I think the McKinney Act has done a lot of good. It has helped local shelters do a lot more than just shelter people. In the early 80s the four S's -- soup, salvation, shower, and shelter -- were all that they provided. It wasn't enough. People need more than the basic necessities. The one big area where we've failed is employment. Most homeless people just need a decent job to get off the streets. Reagan emphasized that the best service you can give anyone is to offer them a job. We could halve the population of homeless people simply by instituting job training and placement programs. This country needs to stop deciding who is deserving and who is undeserving of services.

Perspective: Fred Karnas, Jr., Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Development U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

NCH: What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act?

F.K.: When it was on the Hill, I was running the program in Phoenix. So as far as legislation, I mostly took the lead of Maria Foscarinas and Bob Hayes. I contacted legislators, wrote letters, and reviewed the Homeless Person's Survival Act, the original name of the McKinney Act. It established the key elements for the McKinney Act.

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the Act at that time?

F.K.: I think it symbolically stated the government's responsibility. Other than FEMA, there was never any targeted program for homeless people. I first became involved in 1983, and back then we begged, borrowed, and stole in order to meet people's needs. We made do with whatever we could find. So in '87, basically the Act said that this problem is real. I find that so many people who work with homelessness don't know the history of the McKinney Act. They have no idea how many people put themselves on the line, like Michael Stoops, Mitch Snyder, and Maria Foscarinas, just to spark some action in Congress. But no one ever intended the McKinney Act to be a permanent fix.

> "Our society has separated; if you're well-enough off you really don't need to come in contact with homeless people. This allows the stereotypes to persist. You can turn the other way. We won't truly address the issue until the political will comes from the American public."

NCH: On that same vein, how do you think the significance of the Act has changed in the past ten years?

F.K.: Now people see it as a stream of funding. However, homelessness still continues because the McKinney Act does not address any of the root causes such as racial and economic inequality. It simply plugged a hole that should have been plugged by mainstream programs, which have diminished since '87.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

F.K.: For lots of reasons. . . Unfortunately including the loss of focus within the American public. Most may step over homeless people on the street; however, that may likely be the only contact some wealthy people ever have. Therefore, the rich become more separate from the poor. This gap helps the rich and powerful to deny reality. So the stereotype of a drunk homeless person remains unchallenged for too many people. They don't see homeless families or children. The mental health system is decimated, and we face tremendous injustice from the racial and economic inequalities.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

F.K.: A lot depends on welfare reform. I believed that we needed a new welfare system, but I wouldn't have chosen this model. If it makes us focus on employment and helps the country generate jobs, then there should be positive results. But if we don't generate the kinds of jobs we need, that pay livable wages and provide benefits, we'll see more and more people becoming

homeless. We also need to consider day care and job training. Another factor involves how we address the issue of substance abuse. More and more people consider substance abuse a disease. But there is a mean-spirited side of people that judges substance abusers as not eligible for anything. If we find more people in favor of the second opinion, we'll find more homeless people untreated. The funding hasn't even touched affordable housing, which is a fundamental factor.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this nation to end homelessness?

F.K.: I continue to believe that the gap needs to be addressed. Our society has separated; if you're well-enough off you really don't need to come in contact with homeless people. This allows the stereotypes to persist. You can turn the other way. We won't truly address the issue until the political will comes from the American public.

Perspective: Jean Hochran, Human Resources and Services Administration U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness over the past 10 years?

J.H.: I initially became involved with programs for homeless people in 1990, as staff within DHHS' Bureau of Primary Health Care, responsible for program policy for the Health Care for the Homeless program. In 1992, I became the program director for the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) program, the McKinney component which supports mental health services for homeless persons with serious mental illnesses. In 1995, I returned to the Bureau of Primary Health Care to direct the Health Care for the Homeless Program.

"The McKinney Act programs are still filling the first of these roles, to provide targeted services to persons who are homeless. However, the mainstream provider system has not made use of the lessons learned. Instead, they have allowed the providers of targeted homeless services to become the primary resource for the delivery of appropriate care for homeless persons."

NCH: What was the significance of the McKinney Act? What is the significance now?

J.H.: The McKinney Act provided funds for the support of targeted services for persons who are homeless. It also offered the opportunity for service providers to develop models of care for homeless persons which could be utilized by more "mainstream" providers to enhance the appropriateness of the care they provide to homeless persons.

The McKinney Act programs are still filling the first of these roles, to provide targeted services to persons who are homeless. However, the mainstream provider system has not made use of the lessons learned. Instead, they have allowed the providers of targeted homeless services to become the primary resource for the delivery of appropriate care for homeless persons.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

J.H.: One significant factor in the perpetuation of homelessness is the inability of various components of the human services system to respond collaboratively to the needs of persons who are homeless. A second, equally important factor is the inability of the human services sector to recognize and deal with the risk factors that lead to homelessness, including poverty, unemployment, incarceration, etc.

"One significant factor in the perpetuation of homelessness is the inability of various components of the human services system to respond collaboratively to the needs of persons who are homeless. A second, equally important factor is the inability of the human services sector to recognize and deal with the risk factors that lead to homelessness, including poverty, unemployment, incarceration, etc."

Homeless persons and those at risk have multiple needs and often struggle with multiple challenges. We have not yet achieved successful collaboration within related service systems, e.g. health care and behavioral health providers. Equally important, service providers have only begun to recognize the need to interface with housing providers, employers, educational systems, and other essential resources to address and prevent further homelessness.

Perspective: Jim Parker, Former Coordinator Adult Education for the Homeless Program

NCH: How did you become involved with homelessness?

J.P: Actually, I was sitting in the Rayburn Building during the McKinney Act decision-making process when a senator asked Mr. Mitch Snyder, "Do you think a literacy program for homeless people is needed?" He responded "Yes, Senator," and that was it. I was thinking, "What in the world are adult educators going to do for homeless folks?" At first I thought it was crazy idea, but it turned out to be wonderful!

NCH: What do you think was the significance of the McKinney Act in 1987?

J.P: Originally the significance was simply recognition of the problem by the Administration. The Act forced this country to admit that we have a severe problem with homelessness. The McKinney Act was a political breakthrough because it established a provision for adult education. It created a new mission for us. During the first two years, every state got a little seed money to develop homeless programs. These allocations broke new ground for adult education.

> "Until this country develops a holistic vision of what a just society should be, scattered funding will continue. It'll be a program here, a program there. . . Splinter programs are cut or raised according to political whims. Homelessness is a huge dilemma in this country, but we seem to have missed the overall goal."

NCH: How do you feel that the significance of the Act has changed in the past ten years?

J.P: Now we have no direct appropriations for adult education for the homeless. Congress cut federal funds in the FY95 budget; most of the programs ran until the end of 1995, but have diminished after that. The McKinney Act not only supplied many programs with operation money, but it increased the chances of states receiving supplementary funding from other sources. For example, at one point, New York received half a million dollars a year, and were able to receive half a million more from other funding. The previous McKinney funding was a major factor in obtaining this type of support.

In recent years, block grants have over taken a lot of things. Policy-makers want to simplify social programs, hoping that it will reduce overhead by delegating the responsibility to the states. These block grants allow the state to decide who gets the money. We can encourage them to fund homeless adult education, but they don't have to do it. By pushing decision-making to the state and local level, no one can be sure of the outcome.

NCH: Why do you think homelessness has persisted?

J.P: Because people are under-educated, for both work and family life. I mean under-educated in a broad sense, not just reading and writing. Many people aren't trainable for jobs. Many states are not providing programs to educate homeless people for the jobs they could do. Immigrants are in need of English language skills. The number of high school dropouts is another factor in the persistence of homelessness.

NCH: What trends do you foresee in homelessness?

J.P: More homeless families, more need for basic and life skills, less ability for public education to meet their needs. This sounds negative. Do I have any positive guesses about the future? Yes, I think that homelessness will become a political issue for the year 2000, and must again be dealt with by Congress.

NCH: What does this nation need to do in order to end homelessness?

J.P: Universal health insurance, universal literacy, pre-employment and workplace education and training -- we need to invest in all of them. The big answers are easy, making them happen is tough. I haven't even mentioned housing have I? For some policy-makers, it's the only answer. But without education and job training, homeless people will be in there and then out again. The goal should include earning a livable wage, so they can pay for housing and be healthy, wealthy, and wise.

"In recent years, block grants have over taken a lot of things. Policy-makers want to simplify social programs, hoping that it will reduce overhead by delegating the responsibility to the states. These block grants allow the state to decide who gets the money. We can encourage them to fund homeless adult education, but they don't have to do it. By pushing decision-making to the state and local level, no one can be sure of the outcome."

Until this country develops a holistic vision of what a just society should be, scattered funding will continue. It'll be a program here, a program there. . . Splinter programs are cut or raised according to political whims. Homelessness is a huge dilemma in this country, but we seem to have missed the overall goal. An emphasis now is helping homeless children. The government provides money to the schools, but programs to help the kids' parents aren't funded. As long as their parents are homeless, kids will be homeless. Why not deal with the family as a whole? We need to talk (and fund) life-long learning.

One good thing that our modest adult education program did to combat homelessness was to help people manipulate the system. Governments create these complicated programs without any guide to help the clients sort through it all. In this aspect, the literacy program has been even more important to their survival. I see it as an enabling program.

Perspective: Sherrie Kay, Milwaukee Task Force Against Hunger
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the McKinney Act in 1987?

S.K.: Obviously, it provided a whole lot of funding for homeless people which was previously unavailable: emergency funds, housing, job placement. Omnibus as it was, it was really important. The government was sort of feeling around in the dark, so it was a bit disorganized. They couldn't have predicted everything -- hindsight is always 20/20.

NCH: What do you think the significance of the McKinney Act is now, ten years later?

S.K.: It's much more significant now that it's up for reauthorization. This makes us admit that we failed and that we still have pervasive homelessness. We didn't do what we needed to in order to protect adequately.

NCH: Why do you think that homelessness has persisted?

S.K.: Because we live in a nation that believes that not everyone merits decent housing; it's an issue of values.

"A decade ago, people were not only offended but aghast when I'd show slides of homeless people with children in them. They'd ask, 'Whose kids are they?' And when I told them they were homeless they'd say 'NO WAY.' But now people respond to homeless families like 'so what?'"

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

S.K.: Definitely more homeless children, or children who will be affected by homelessness in their lifetime. I remember a decade ago, working in the basement of a church, serving mainly alcoholic older men. But, now the face is changing. There has been a great wave of children and families which we can directly correlate to Reagan. Now it's all you hear about: child care, education for homeless children, health care for children. Poverty is affecting kids. A decade ago, people were not only offended but aghast when I'd show slides of homeless people with children in them. They'd ask, "Whose kids are they?" And when I told them they were homeless they'd say "NO WAY." But now people respond to homeless families like "so what?"

NCH: In you opinion, what needs to happen in order for this nation to end homelessness?

S.K.: We need to redistribute wealth, and the government needs to take responsibility of that. It's a simple, sweeping idea. Our governor declares that all people can work. I just want to reply, "Oh yeah? Well, I've met some people who never would be able to work." But what he says must be true, right? I think we should go back to the philosophy of Teddy Roosevelt. A chicken in every pot.

Perspective: John Parvensky, Colorado Coalition for the Homeless

NCH: What role did you play in the passage of the McKinney Act?

J.P. I spent a week with Michael Stoops and Mitch Snyder sleeping on grates in the streets of Washington, DC. During this week we made daily visits to Senators and Congress people to discuss the importance of the Act.

"We need to form a new housing policy. The nation must realize that housing for profit will not meet the needs of all its citizens. The public sector must play a role in providing affordable housing, otherwise homelessness will continue to increase."

NCH: Do you feel that this approach was more effective than the traditional?

J.P. Well, it definitely raised my self-consciousness. I would have been much more comfortable discussing the issues with the Congressmen if I was wearing a business suit and had showered. But, it made me aware of the obstacles that homeless people face every day.

NCH: What was the significance of the McKinney Act in 1987?

I was the first time that the problems of homeless people received national recognition. The federal funding is key because it supports everything from health care to housing for homeless people.

NCH: What impact does the Act have now? Has anything changed since 1987?

J.P.: The McKinney Act is still the most significant piece of legislation affecting the homeless population of Colorado. Our programs would be seriously compromised without it; it allowed us to create an infrastructure.

NCH: Why do you think that has homelessness persisted?

Lack of affordable housing. Many full-time workers are unable to afford housing. Obviously it's even tougher if you lose your job or become disabled people and rely on public assistance. There is also a need for substance abuse treatment centers that are affordable and accessible. Without these things the numbers of homeless people will continue to increase.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

J.P.: We'll have a harder time getting volunteers because everyone is frustrated.

NCH: What is the root of this frustration?

J.P.: Well, everyone who supports homeless people have invested so much of their time and money and have seen so little improvement. Even in a healthy economy, the recent funding cuts and welfare reform have led to disillusionment with social programs in general.

NCH: In your opinion, what needs to happen in order for this nation to end homelessness?

J.P.: We need to form a new housing policy. The nation must realize that housing for profit will not meet the needs of all its citizens. The public sector must play a role in providing affordable housing, otherwise homelessness will continue to increase.

Perspective: Richard Troxell, House the Homeless, Inc., Austin, Texas

NCH: How have you been involved in homelessness over the past 10 years? What is your experience with the McKinney Act?

R.T.: In the 1970s, I worked for Legal Services Corporation in Philadelphia. I was a mortgage foreclosure prevention specialist. People were losing their homes to foreclosure at an incredible rate. I was trying everything I could think of, negotiating with HUD, doing anything and everything to help people get by in hard times. What happened was that our corporations realized that they no longer had market share and they needed to get back on line, so they started laying people off, tens of thousands of them, in the labor intensive industries in the area like coal and steel. We finally went to the sheriff and said "look, you're foreclosing on more people than in the Great Depression, this has to stop." And it did, we got a moratorium. We were witnessing the beginning of homelessness on a large scale.

Facts About Homelessness in Austin

- An estimated 6,000 persons are homeless on any given night.
- There are 330 emergency shelter beds and 210 transitional housing slots.
- An estimated 8,000 school-aged children are doubled up in hotels.
- In 1995, the Salvation Army operated at 149% capacity and was forced to turn away 300 families, including 718 children. 1,200 individuals were turned away.
- A survey of visibly homeless men found that 83% worked.
- The hourly wage needed to afford a one-bedroom apartment in Austin is $9.67; more than twice the minimum wage ($12.88) is needed to rent a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent.

I came to Austin in 1989 and created Legal Aid for the Homeless at Legal Aid of Central Texas. I realized that I couldn't do what I needed to because of federal guidelines, so I founded House the Homeless, Inc., the non-profit organization I direct. I am also Co-Chair of the Austin Area Homelessness Task Force and Chairman of the Austin Area Homeless Coalition.

In terms of my involvement with McKinney, we wrote to Bill Clinton when he was running for President about the need to do something with the military bases, and we outlined a detailed program for Bergstrom Air Base -- a housing and a job training program. He said yes, he was interested, we could do this. Locally, we got the city council to set aside the base hospital, NCO club, and two barracks, and the city and county agreed to move the local health clinic to the first floor to be the anchor. So that was the plan. Then the city hired a consultant who was paid $40,000. He said that the military base was "not a healthy environmentfor this process," that it wasn't good for the homeless. It was good enough for veterans, for the military, and for babies -- there was a birthing center there -- but it wasn't good enough for homeless people. So the city was gleeful, and they took back the whole thing.

"I was a mortgage foreclosure prevention specialist. People were losing their homes to foreclosure at an incredible rate... We finally went to the sheriff and said 'look, you're foreclosing on more people than in the Great Depression, this has to stop.' And it did, we got a moratorium. We were witnessing the beginning of homelessness on a large scale."

We had no choice but to find an attorney and sue under the McKinney Act. The Act basically states that federal property that is either under-utilized or no longer used by the government is

to then be made available to assist the homeless population. Our contention was that a portion of this base was built with federal dollars, and was about to be shut down, and as a result, we should therefore be entitled to it under McKinney. So we sued the government and the city of Austin, and we lost in District Court. Then we appealed to the 5th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in New Orleans and we lost, even though the government admitted in court that five parcels of land and all of the buildings were built with federal dollars. We appealed to the Supreme Court, and got to the fifth of six prerequisite stages, but they wouldn't hear it. They heard the Paula Jones case instead. In spite of federal law, a study reveals that less than 5% of all allowable federal property has ended up benefiting the homeless community under McKinney.

"We must declare war on homelessness. We must declare a moral war -- that no one should be allowed to be hungry, that no one should go without shelter -- that is the moral obligation for each of us. We must also declare a war on homelessness in pragmatic ways. "

NCH: What, for you, was the significance of the Act?

R.T.: We were hoping that it would be a major reversal of the Reagan retraction of funding to housing authorities and a new conduit of funds to municipalities to address homelessness. But the funding has historically been too insignificant and presented in such a way that it has caused dissention among the various providers. Everyone is competing over limited monies to address very expansive problems.

NCH: Why has homelessness persisted?

R.T.: Primarily because the valve is wide open. The things that have lead us to homelessness have never been addressed. For example, in Austin, one-third of the homeless population are veterans. We have a federal bureaucracy, the Veterans Administration, that has been inept at dealing with this issue. As a result, tax-payers feel ripped off, and veterans continue to suffer. Also, we have not successfully addressed the needs of the people released from mental health institutions in the 1980s. Another major problem is that the funding needed for substance abuse treatment is not there. But the biggest reason is that people are not able to earn a wage sufficient to get them safe, decent, affordable housing.

People have a great fear of becoming homeless, so they distance themselves from those that are homeless. They think that there must be something wrong with homeless people... they often think that they must <u>want</u> to be there. But if you look at the numbers, like the statistic cited by the Clinton Administration that the number of persons who experienced homelessness in the latter half of the 1980s was between five and nine million people -- it begs common sense to suggest that <u>that</u> many people <u>wanted</u> to experience this horrific situation.

NCH: What trends in homelessness do you foresee?

R.T.: Because the size of the homeless population is growing, the conflicts based on survival are becoming more intense. The factions between the Haves and Have Nots are growing. For example, in Austin, we have 22,000 millionaires and 6,000 homeless people in a city with a population of 500,000. That boggles the mind. That's the extreme I'm talking about. We have not only a financial separation, but an intellectual separation, because the Have Nots have never entered the technology-based economy. As the populations and the differences increase, it doesn't bode well for the underpinnings of our society.

I view life as a yardstick -- three feet. In the first foot, we are young, learning, and dependent on society. In the third foot, we are old, and again dependent on society. The middle foot is the

foot that sustains the other two -- it is the working foot. That working foot is eroding. We are allowing greater numbers to fall out of the middle foot, and as a result, the weight at either end is growing. The yardstick can potentially snap because the middle can no longer sustain the two ends. The lesson there, to all of us, is that we need to reach out, whether it is for compassionate reasons or for the logical need to shore up the underpinnings of our society. We must resolve this crisis.

"Leadership. It will take leadership at the highest levels -- someone who understands what we have just said about the heart of the nation and its welfare and the intertwining of those two -- that it is the future of the country we are talking about."

NCH: What needs to happen in order for this country to end homelessness?

R.T.: Leadership. It will take leadership at the highest levels -- someone who understands what we have just said about the heart of the nation and its welfare and the intertwining of those two -- that it is the future of the country we are talking about. We must declare war on homelessness. We must declare a moral war -- that no one should be allowed to be hungry, that no one should go without shelter, or without adequate health care -- that is the moral obligation for each of us. We must also declare a war on homelessness in pragmatic ways. For example, we need national legislation that mandates that local wages be tied to the cost of housing, such that if someone works 40 hours a week, they will be ensured of getting off of the streets and finding housing for themselves. Beyond that, the clarion call must reverberate to the Governors and the Mayors and to the community groups and individuals -- we must collaborate and cooperate with clear intent to resolve this problem. Finally, we must learn to accept that the needs of homeless persons are legitimate. Then, we must respond to those needs in an comprehensive and compassionate fashion while simultaneously involving those persons that are most affected.

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